

## **How Council's can enable community driven food security.**

### **Preface**

**The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations defines that food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.**

Around the globe, year-to-year impacts due to natural disasters and conflict cause variations in international food prices, foreign exchange earnings, domestic food production and household incomes which in turn influences household food security and the nutrition of individuals within families.

In Australia, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has national policy responsibility for the food production and processing chain. DAFF works with industry sectors aiming for improved international competitiveness and innovation.

The National Food Policy working group was established in December 2010 to advise government on issues and policies affecting Australia's food chain and to develop a National Food Plan.

In an attempt to inform the development of the National Food Plan, the National Sustainable Food Summit was held in Melbourne in April 2011. Broad discussion between the 340 delegates comprising farmers, scientists, health workers, industry leaders, government officials and community representatives raised issues of levels of food production in Australia and equity in distribution in the face of many challenges including peak oil, peak phosphorous, peak land, peak water and increasing climate variability. While it was reported that research showed that 58% of people think that the federal government should be responsible for food availability to Australians and 2% thought local government should be responsible, it was evident during the workshop sessions that community action was the driver for delivering reliable local food supply systems.

There is growing interest at the local government level throughout Australia and internationally in developing pathways that enable their communities to respond to climate variability and subsequently develop local food security initiatives. There is also recognition at a local government level that collaboration within the departments of individual councils and across local area boundaries represents cost savings and time efficiencies.

Northern Rivers Food Links is a Council co-operation initiative of seven New South Wales Northern Rivers Councils and Rous Water and seeks to:

- Mitigate climate change impacts associated with food production and distribution by:
  - Addressing distribution inefficiencies that result in unnecessary ‘food miles’ for locally produced food.
  - Supporting take-up of more sustainable food production practices with particular emphasis on farming inputs, land-use management in a changing climate and off-farm environmental impacts.
- Strengthen community resilience to climate change and peak oil impacts.

The Northern Rivers Food Links Local Government Resource Kit – Food Security Policies is a program area of Northern Rivers Food Links. The program provides resources for Councils to develop and implement food related policy, procedures and practices which enable locally driven initiatives addressing food production, distribution and consumption.

This project has been assisted by the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust.

### **What can Councils do to enable community driven food security?**

Councils develop local policies, development control plans (DCP's) and local environmental plans (LEP's) that enable implementation of actions of special significance and relevance to their local communities by influencing decisions regarding land use.

Dialogue between the seven Northern Rivers Councils has examined the ‘strategic intent’ of food security policy considering the needs of their individual communities, elected representatives and Council staff and collaboratively they have agreed that the templates enclosed within this kit have broad relevance and may be of use to many NSW Councils.

### **General recommendations to Local Government that guide and support community driven food security initiatives**

#### **Policies**

1. Adopt local food security policies that facilitate local food systems. The ‘food system’ includes all the components and processes by which food is produced (grown and/or processed), stored and distributed, delivered to end-consumers and consumed (including further processing and storage) – as well as all the processes that deal

with waste along the 'food chain'. The policies should address activities upon land that Council had vested in its' control and private land.

2. Ensure that local food security policies, application and assessment processes are consistent with relevant acts of parliament, regulations, codes and guidelines.
3. Adopt local policies concerning community gardens, farmers markets, roadside stalls, edible streetscapes and sustainable catering that reference a broader policy concerning sustainable agriculture and community wellbeing.

#### Resourcing

4. Identify a department of Council and staff who will provide a contact point for members of the community seeking assistance to enhance local food systems. Support that action through collaboration across the Council departments i.e. community and economic development, planning, environmental health, waste management, outdoor services, assets management etc.
5. Work collaboratively across the region when responding to the same state government requirements in order to maximise staff efficiencies make best use of available resources.
6. Utilise established networks and educational tools.

#### Review

7. Keep a watching brief on local, regional, state, inter-state, national and international food security issues, directions and actions.
8. Review policies and actions as required and engage the community and industry through Council's Community Strategic Plan and associated Integrated Planning reforms.
9. Distribute information in accessible ways i.e. Council websites and newsletters to draw community attention to opportunities to engage in local food security initiatives.

#### **What's in the kit?**

The Northern Rivers Food Links Local Government Resource Kit – Food Security Policies is a resource for Councils who are interested in enabling a community response to food security issues.

The five areas of focus within this kit are:

- community gardens
- edible streetscapes
- farmers markets
- road side stalls and
- sustainable catering.

The kit contains:

- policy templates
- application forms
- guidelines
- appendices containing web addresses for available resources
- information sheets and
- case studies.

The implementation of these template policies and supporting documents will need to be reviewed at a local level in order to:

- address local needs as identified in the Community Strategic Plan and local planning processes and to
- provide opportunities for Council to document its performance in addressing community need through statutory reporting reforms.

### **How was the kit developed?**

The Northern Rivers Food Links Local Government Resource Kit – Food Security Policies was developed by:

- gathering existing policies from the seven Councils in the Northern Rivers Region
- talking with staff and Councillors about what they expected from the resource kit and how Councils would adopt and use the resource
- talking with co-ordinators of Northern Rivers Food Links Village Showcase projects
- gathering examples of policies from other areas identified as “best practice”
- examining the legislative framework that Councils operate in including numerous Acts, regulations, codes and guidelines associated with the growth and sale of food on public and private land, approvals and responsibilities concerning activities conducted on crown land and road reserves
- developing draft policy and supporting documentation and
- workshopping templates across the management portfolios of individual Councils.

Though this process it was evident that, Council staff interpret the content of acts, regulations and codes differently, and usually there is a contact officer with particular expertise within a Council who the public are referred to regarding specific enquiries and interpretations.

Examples of Council staff holding responsibilities for policy areas include:

- community gardens : planners, open spaces staff, environmental health officers, community development workers
- farmers markets : environmental health officers, assets managers, planners
- edible streetscapes : open spaces staff, assets managers, sustainability officers
- roadside stalls : assets managers, planners, building inspectors
- sustainable catering : corporate services, all staff.

Councils apply variable controls over specific activities based on their definitions of that activity.

For members of the public who are conducting activities across Council boundaries this can become confusing.

The templates in this Local Government Resource kit aim to provide some consistency and provide an enabling process to encourage community driven food security actions.

The templates also provide a place to start for Councils embarking on the journey of developing food security policy that can facilitate community resilience and engagement.