

JC:1450

23rd August 2011

The Manager
National Food Plan Unit
Department of Agricultural, Fisheries and Forestry
PO Box 858
Canberra City ACT 2601



Dear Sir

Our Company is a NSW based Poultry Processor and we are also a member of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF). Dr Vivien Kite has lodged a submission on behalf of the ACMF/Industry, which we support, however we thought it appropriate to lodge an additional submission focusing on the NSW market.

In 2010, the NSW Government conducted a Sydney Metropolitan Strategy Review, elements of which are relevant for consideration in formulating the National Food Plan (NFP). We provided a submission for this Review and attach a copy for your reference.

At the heart of our submission is the undeniable fact that successive Governments have allowed Agricultural production to be eroded in population centres such as Sydney, with the long term impact being the loss of valuable food supply production areas and job creating companies. A continuation of this trend could inevitably see the loss of the Industry from the Sydney Basin. Our submission highlights these very important issues and the urgent need for action to arrest further damage to an industry that represents the most significant source of high quality meat protein to the Australian consumer. In summary, the submission outlines:-

- Industry Overview in NSW, with a significant drop in NSW's national market share over the last 10 years or more;
- Reasons for the NSW loss of market share;
- Impact of the loss of production capacity in the Sydney Basin;
- Metropolitan Strategy – recognition that the Sydney basin is the major food bowl in the State;
- Need to develop a Strategic Plan for the Sydney Basin, which clearly has overriding importance in a National context.

Given the relevance of the above comments from a National perspective, I would recommend that:-

1. In formulating a NFP, strategic agricultural industries should be identified in the major population centres and measures put in place to ensure the survival and growth of those industries. The Poultry Industry in the Sydney basin has been reduced to two remaining processing operations, viz. Cordina and Red Lea Groups (assuming the pending closure of the Inghams Plant in Liverpool). As a result, not only has food supply capacity been reduced to a dangerous level, but job opportunities have been lost. It is well recognized by the NSW Government that the Industry in the Sydney basin is under pressure, requiring Government intervention to protect the future production base. To emphasise the importance of the Cordina/Red Lea Groups to the Sydney region as a future production and employment source, we note the following:-

- ✦ Chickens grown and processed : 900,000-1,000,000 per week;
- ✦ Employ directly in processing operations (including contractors) over 1,000 people;
- ✦ Indirect employment from activities is significant. For instance, Sydney based feed mills would supply over 4,000 tonnes of feed weekly to farms of the joint operations;
- ✦ Contract over 80% of Sydney based broiler chicken farms and eventually this will move to 100%. Grower income exceeds \$30 million pa;
- ✦ Combined turnover approximately \$350 million pa.

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2. The Federal Government should work in concert with the State Government, which is currently developing its own Strategic Food Plan. There are obviously cross-over areas, but it would be beneficial to jointly develop strategies on such issues as identifying and providing for viable agricultural production areas, including Government owned land and providing Industry based incentives. We point out that NSW's recent announcement of new residential land release areas, takes up approximately 17.5% of our current broiler growing sites, with no provisions to replace this capacity with alternatives. Obviously other agricultural industries will also be lost in these land release areas. It is simply unsustainable from a food security perspective, to continue to lose productive agricultural capacity in this manner.

Therefore in summary, we would identify a number of key issues that need to be addressed in developing the NFP:-

- Fresh food production capacity should be maintained and expanded in and around population centres, to protect future food security and reduce high transport costs. Food security would be aided by fostering Industries in areas where the environmental conditions are most favourable. Water supply is more reliable in coastal regions;
- Food security is at risk from the onerous Government (Environmental) regulation which has seen the demise of many business operations in populated areas. There is an imbalance in favour of consumer protection and this factor has to be redressed. Agricultural production has to be given a higher priority in the interests of future food security. Chicken is a short shelf life product and it is imperative that Industry be located in close proximity to major markets;
- Food production capacity needs to be assured by Government providing areas for the Industries to develop, which will involve making land available and applying the appropriate planning laws that will provide investor security;
- Maximise consumer benefits: Consumers can be delivered the freshest product with the lowest distribution costs if production bases are located close to population centres;
- Recognition of the concentration/dominance in the retail sector which directly affects the viability of many agricultural industries. A NFP should look at the means in which this dominance can be capped or even reversed.

Yours faithfully



John Cordina
Director, Chief Executive
Cordina Chicken Farms Pty Limited

Atts: Submission Cover Sheet
Previous Submission



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JC:1133

24th May 2010

Metropolitan Strategy Review
Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
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Email: metrostrategy@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir

POULTRY INDUSTRY SUBMISSION – METROPOLITAN STRATEGY REVIEW

On Behalf of Independent Processors located in the Sydney Basin:
Cordina Chicken Farms Pty Limited/Summertime Chicken Pty Limited and
Red Lea Chickens Pty Limited

1. INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

The NSW chicken meat industry consists of two key groups made up of processing companies and contract growers. There are five vertically integrated processor companies operating in NSW, engaging in the breeding, hatching, growing and processing of chicken meat products for distribution for within Australia and for export. Processing plants are located in the following areas:

- Baiada/Steggles: Newcastle, Griffith, Tamworth plus interstate operations
- Inghams: Liverpool, Newcastle plus interstate operations
- Cordina/Summertime: Girraween (Cordina) and Galston (Summertime)
- Red Lea: Blacktown
- Sunnybrand: Byron Bay

There are approximately 270 growers in NSW consisting mainly of non-processor company growers being either private independent small business entities contracted to one processor or corporations operating larger growing sites (for Baiada/Steggles). I have attached an aerial image of the Sydney and Central Coast regions, plotting the various locations of existing broiler and turkey farms. Inghams have ceased contract broiler growing in the Sydney basin, however have turkey farms in the south-west centring round the Picton area (attached image: green

dots). Baiada have recently closed their Pendle Hill processing plant, but still have under contract approximately 18 broiler farms (blue dots).

These contracts are expected to be eventually terminated or transferred to other processors. Cordina/Summertime, with 32 farms (yellow dots), and Red Lea, 38 farms (red dots), have by far the largest presence in the Metropolitan area. The farms are broadly spread through the Sydney basin and the economic impact in their localities is significant. A summary of farms remaining in the Metropolitan area is as follows:

	Metropolitan	% of Total Farms
Cordina/Summertime	32	58 (total 55 farms contracted)
Red Lea	38	75 (total 51 farms contracted)
Baiada/Steggles	18	

Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) estimate that in 2006/7 the gross value of production in Australia was \$1.367 billion of which 94% or \$1.29billion is chicken meat, the retail sale value of which was \$2.7billion. Over the last 10 years NSW has increased the number of birds slaughtered from 36,538,900 in September (Qtr) 1998 to 37,382,400 in September 2008, an increase of 2.3% (Interstate comparatives: Victoria 15.8%, Queensland 47.5% and SA & WA 35%). In the same period, the production of Chicken Meat in NSW has increased 13.5% from 59,616 tonnes to 67,693 tonnes. However, countercyclical to these moderate increases is the fact that as a percentage of the total number of chickens slaughtered in Australia, NSW has DECLINED from 39.3% in September 1998 to 32% in September 2008. In the same period the production of chicken meat in NSW has fallen from 41.8% to 32.9%. Over the 10 year period, NSW has lost market share to all other states, 7% in terms of birds slaughtered and 9% in terms of meat production. (Ref: Economic Worth Study of the NSW Chicken Meat Industry E-Generation Marketing, May 2009).

This loss of market share resulting from the uncompetitive trading environment in NSW is continuing. Following the Bartter/Steggles takeover by Baiada in 2009, the Baiada Pendle Hill processing operation has been closed and Inghams have confirmed that their Liverpool processing site will close in 2010-11. These two plants (will) represent a loss of approximately 50% of the Metropolitan and well over 20% of NSW's production capacity and inevitably a significant portion of this production will be taken up by interstate operations. The loss of jobs as a result of these closures are estimated to be between 500-800 jobs, but more significant is the loss of investment (with its multiplier effect) for NSW. In recent years, it is estimated that Inghams have invested interstate in excess of \$250 million in new facilities and when plant expansions in Queensland, South Australia and (now) Victoria are added, this figure would probably increase to the \$400 million plus range. Likewise, Baiada's recent interstate investment has been in excess of \$50 million and future developments for the newly combined Baiada/Steggles business in NSW are in the balance.

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According to the attached Sun Herald article of 16th May, 43% of poultry meat is produced in the Sydney basin, but refers to internal government analysis that predicts the planned redevelopments in the north-west and south-west growth areas will lead to a possible 35% drop in poultry meat production. It would appear that this Government prediction has been seriously underestimated and it is significant that the north-west and south-west redevelopments have yet to fully take place.

In summary, the production capacity in the Sydney basin has been decimated and in the near future there will only be two operations remaining, i.e. Cordina/Summertime and Red Lea. Whilst national companies Baiada/Steggles and Inghams have the flexibility to transfer production to their lower cost interstate operations, the Sydney based independent operations do not have that luxury.

2. NSW LOSS OF MARKET SHARE

A study commissioned by the Poultry Industry (Economic Worth of the NSW Chicken Meat Industry, prepared by E-Generation Marketing May 2009), identified a number of key factors for the decline of the chicken meat industry in NSW:

- * major processors are relocating and expanding into other states, South Australia being a prime example. This has resulted in other states (notably Victoria and South Australia) increasing their percentage production of chicken meat compared to NSW's whose percentage production is continuing to fall considerably;
- * increasing difficulties being experienced by growers and processors when trying to grow their businesses through expansion of existing or establishment of new facilities, making expansion in NSW problematic. It can take up to two years and cost over \$200,000 for development applications to be processed, with a Baiada development application in Tamworth for a new broiler farm taking 7 years to assess and may still not proceed due to onerous approval conditions;
- * urbanisation of older poultry meat locations, firstly from the ongoing encroachment of high density urbanisation spreading out across western and south-western suburbs of Sydney; secondly, through the ingress of ex-Sydney people relocating to a country lifestyle in existing chicken meat regions. Both factors accentuate the urgency for the industry to relocate;
- * the increasing tendency for community groups such as 'voiceless' to lobby against the industry. Socio-political motives are impacting on the ability to develop the poultry industry across NSW;

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- * the number of local and state government departments involved in the development approval process has created inter and intra-departmental discussion and delays, adding to problems in the NSW industry with additional lags and conflict.

As indicated above, low cost regimes in other states have provided a stimulus for processor companies such as Inghams and Baiada/Steggles to gradually move their operations interstate. In their report, E-Generation has identified various incentives that have been offered to processing companies by other states:

- * low cost planning and development application fees;
- * government subsidies in the form of low interest and/or long term loans or grants;
- * lower wage costs;
- * value adding through innovative technologies, such as partnerships with private companies that build pilot plants for converting litter waste to fertiliser and energy in the form of electricity;
- * minimal legislative restrictions; i.e. government acts and regulations;
- * reduced development application approval times;
- * more collaborative approaches that develop cooperation between business, government and communities.

As noted above, the impact of the above enticements has been significant. The South Australian poultry strategic plan has set an ambitious plan of capturing 50% of the anticipated national consumption growth to the 10 years to 2015. This would grow the gross food value of the Industry to \$956million in 2015 (2005 \$324million). Significant investment by the two national processors has taken place in response to SA strategic plan. In Victoria, The Bendigo Regional Poultry Cluster was formed in 2005 and stemmed from the recognition of the economic worth of the poultry industry to the Bendigo regional economy. The key to the success of this approach was the regional and state government taking a cooperative approach that was supportive of the industry.

Both of these strategies are successfully providing a sustainable competitive advantage over other areas in Australia, in contrast to the Sydney basin where barriers to growth are slowly strangling the industry. IS NSW GOING TO CONTINUE TO STAND ASIDE AND ALLOW SMALLER STATES STIFLE OUR INDUSTRY!

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3. IMPACT ON FUTURE PRODUCTION CAPACITY IN THE SYDNEY BASIN

As stated above, in the near future production in the Sydney basin will be reduced to only two groups - Cordina/Summertime and Red Lea. The competitiveness of these two groups can only be assured if there is access to viable chicken growing facilities. In the 1990's 100% of growing facilities for these groups were located exclusively in the Sydney basin but because of the reasons outlined above, the overwhelming majority of new growing facilities are now accessed from the Central Coast Region, resulting in higher servicing and transport costs. A third of farms are now located outside the Sydney basin.

The importance of the Cordina/Summertime and Red Lea processing operations in the Sydney basin should not be underestimated. In this regard, I highlight some brief statistics:

- * represent approximately 25% of NSW's production capacity - over 800,000 birds processed per week;
- * employ directly approximately 800 employees, with the equivalent wage income in excess of \$40million per annum;
- * contract 70 broiler farms (out of 88) representing 80% of farms located in the Sydney basin - ultimately will contract 100% of broiler farms located in the region;
- * contract a total of 106 broiler farms, representing 39% of State's contract growers;
- * combined turnover approximately \$325 million per annum;
- * combined contract grower income in excess of \$25million per annum.

Clearly, the poultry industry is extremely significant to the various regional communities, dotted throughout the metropolitan and central coast areas. The company would be more than willing to provide a report to the NSW government demonstrating this point by highlighting just how successful the Bendigo poultry cluster has been in terms of growing their regional economy and the associated financial benefits accruing to the community at large. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis can be provided of the Economic Worth of the Industry in the Sydney basin, based on the industry research undertaken by E-Generation Marketing.

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4. METROPOLITAN STRATEGY

The Metropolitan Strategy sets out a long term plan for growth and development in the Sydney Metro region. The Government has stated unequivocally that the Sydney basin is recognised as the major food bowl in the State and that this food production capacity has to be protected. The Premier in the Review Discussion Paper notes a number of focus points including:

- * Sustainable planning for a growing population;
- * Providing more jobs closer to where people are living, especially in Western Sydney;
- * Making Sydney climate change ready;
- * Integrating land-use with transport and infrastructure planning; and
- * **Protecting Land for primary production, open space and conservation especially on Sydney's fringe.**

Any reasonable assessment could only conclude that previous planning strategies have failed badly in relation to the poultry industry and other forms of agriculture. Accordingly, the Metropolitan Strategy needs to incorporate into its planning measures, protection of existing agricultural activity and also make provision, areas for future expansion. Land availability for poultry farming (and intensive agriculture) in the Sydney basin has been in decline and time is literally running out to reverse this disturbing trend. The major integrators, Baiada/Steggles and Ingham, have made no secret of their plans to concentrate expansion investment to facilities outside NSW and unless the two remaining Independent groups are supported in their ability to expand, the industry will come under increasing threat in the Sydney basin.

WHAT IS NEEDED:

- a) There needs to be a strategy/long term plan to create certainty. There has to be a commitment to protect the poultry industry, particularly in the Sydney basin and in this regard **DIRECT GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IS REQUIRED!**
- b) Any Plan for maintaining agriculture should be Sydney metro wide to ensure there are no LGA boundary inconsistencies. Right to Farm legislation should be introduced, incorporating a relaxation in aspects of impractical environmental laws!
- c) There needs to be a mechanism to protect agricultural lands within growth centres. Mechanism needs to allow farmers to continue farming activities without the threat of environmental orders from neighbour complaints. Reverse buffer zones should be considered, i.e. redevelopment should be banned within a certain distance from an agricultural operation/zone as a means of reducing possible conflicts.

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- d) There needs to be a mechanism to facilitate efficient processing of development applications and a 'single approval body' is recommended. A "can do" attitude must be adopted. The current system has tipped the balance against producers, leading to lengthy, costly and inconsistent assessment of development applications. A clear example is the Baiada Tamworth development application which took 7 years to assess and has resulted in onerous consent conditions.
- e) Specific agricultural precincts should be set aside for intensive agriculture and zoned accordingly, with protection from future residential development. Multiple precincts need to be identified to ensure farming sites are adequately separated for bio-security reasons. Environmental laws, particularly in relation to odour and noise need to be relaxed in these zones. Intensive agriculture does not require good quality land, therefore there is an opportunity to identify lower cost and/or otherwise unusable land, making prospective operations more commercially viable.
- f) Government owned land should be made available for agricultural use, as a means of encouraging increased production in the Sydney basin.

5. SUMMARY

Whilst government is going to considerable lengths to plan for NSW's future urban development, equal emphasis has to be placed on protecting the Sydney basin as the most important food production area in this State. There are numerous reasons justifying this approach, such as outlined in the attached Sun Herald article with the rationale obviously recognised by government. The recent long term drought conditions in inland areas, such as Griffith and Tamworth came perilously close to negatively impacting on poultry production and it simply makes good planning sense to maintain viable alternative production areas in the coastal regions, where climate conditions are likely to be more favourable in the future.

Under current conditions, urban sprawl and the high cost of land is driving "traditional agriculture" out of the Sydney basin. In conjunction, government regulation has tipped the balance against the agricultural producer and the time has arrived for this trend to be reversed. It is simply unworkable to expect a farming operation to operate with say nil offensive odour or nil noise at a property boundary, with the possibility that the nearest receptor being only metres away. Farms simply have to be protected!

Clearly, intensive agricultural industries such as poultry and greenhouse farming are integral to the needs of the State's future food production requirements. Even though urban sprawl is gobbling up prime agricultural areas, intensive industries can survive and thrive by implementing

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workable initiatives, such as locating farms in 'poorer quality land precincts' which are more economically viable and isolated from urban development.

It is naive to assume any loss of agricultural production from the Sydney basin will simply be taken up in country precincts with the poultry industry a clear example of massive investment loss for the State. It is incumbent on the Government to adopt a more radical approach to ensure the protection and expansion of poultry farming in the Sydney basin and in the State overall. In this submission, I have proposed several initiatives which I believe are workable, IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE WILL TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE!

Yours faithfully,

John Cordina
Cordina Chicken Farms Pty Limited/Summertime Chicken Pty Limited
Red Lea Chickens Pty Limited

Atts:

cc: Premier, Kristina Keneally: premier@www.nsw.gov.au
Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell: lop@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Reference Documents: The Industry has undertaken extensive research examining the value of the Poultry Industry in NSW. The research reports have only recently been completed by E-Generation Marketing and titled "Economic Worth of the NSW Chicken Meat Industry: Regional Case Studies" and "Poultry Cluster Analysis - Summary Document". These reports which add substantive value and expand on the issues raised above are available to Government upon request.

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SYDNEY BASIN - BROILER & TURKEY FARM LOCATIONS



- CORDINA
- RED LEA
- BASADA
- INGHAMS
- SYDNEY (TURKEY)
- CENTRAL COAST (CHICKENS)

INVESTIGATION

80%

of "perishable" vegetables consumed in NSW are grown in Sydney.

\$1b

Estimated value of the agriculture industry in the Sydney basin.

Sprawl eating us out

Debra Jopson
REGIONAL AFFAIRS

THE body representing 10 western Sydney councils has accused the federal government of ignoring its plans to stop the nation's biggest city from gobbling up its farmland, risking a disastrous loss of crucial fresh food sources.

"The failure to take seriously the need for long-term agricultural land in the Sydney basin will have disastrous consequences for our food supply," Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) president Alison McLaren said.

"The federal government needs to realise that agriculture is not just the domain of rural areas."

State government research estimates the Sydney agricultural industry is worth between \$800 million and \$1 billion annually, with 10 per cent total NSW produce coming from per cent of the state's agricultural land. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows more than 8500 people are employed in the Sydney industry.

Cr McLaren said WSROC's attempts to get a response from the federal government about its Urban Adapt program – aimed at ensuring the continuity of fresh produce to Sydneysiders – had failed.

About 30 groups and institutions, including state departments, are working on the plan despite the lack of federal involvement.

Cr McLaren called on federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke to immediately pledge to work with WSROC and other bodies "to secure the food supply grown in western Sydney".

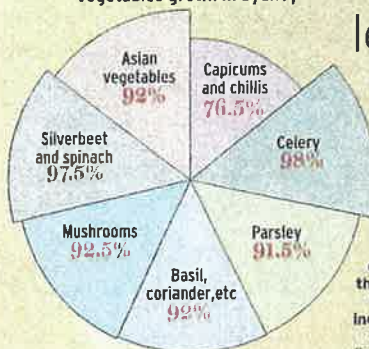
The Sydney region grows about 15 per cent of the state's vegetables, according to NSW Primary Industries research. It produces at least 80 per cent of "perishable" vegetables – those that are fresh, have not been processed and have a short shelf life – for NSW. These include Asian vegetables, capsicums and chillis, celery, parsley, basil, coriander, mushrooms and silverbeet.

It is also the state's most important area for producing chickens, ducks, turkeys and eggs.

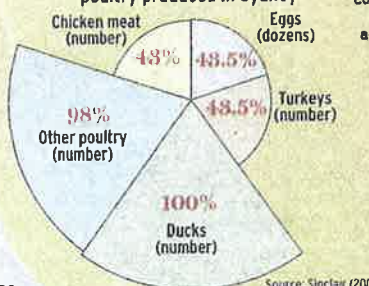
But an internal NSW government analysis has predicted two Sydney areas earmarked as growth centres to house 1 million more residents by 2036 will cause that production to plummet.

Planned development in the north-west and south-west growth areas will lead to a possible 29 per cent drop in vegetables grown and a 35 per cent drop in poultry meat produced.

Percentage of NSW vegetables grown in Sydney



Percentage of NSW poultry produced in Sydney



Source: Sinclair (2008)

smh.com.au

Go online to find out where your food is grown via our interactive map.

"Over 50 per cent of NSW's vegetables are grown in the Murray-Murrumbidgee region, where water availability is becoming a significant issue," says the document, produced by the state department governing agriculture.

"According to Professor [Ross] Garnaut, the rivers in the Murray-Darling basin could deteriorate to a trickle by 2050 as a result of climate change. 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."

Urban Adapt would weigh up how much farmland should be kept on the city fringe and whether there should be new farming zones along motorways, WSROC executive director Jeremy Goff said.

It would consider how to source food when climate change made the

Murray-Darling and Murrumbidgee food bowls less viable. And rising fuel prices would increase the cost of freight food.

Possible new intensive farming greenhouse technology to allow growing food close to the city and a blossoming movement in community gardens were also on the agenda, Mr Goff said.

The aim was to ensure that fresh, equitably priced food would still be available to Sydney people and those in the west in particular.

Most of the city's vegetable farms

Foreign foods may leave a bitter taste

Alicia Wood

AUSTRALIAN vegetable growers are concerned imported produce is bad for our health.

AusVeg spokesman Hugh Tobin said health problems could result from differences in the quality control of overseas farms.

"Australia is increasingly relying on imported produce that is unreliable in quality and is potentially harmful to our health," he said.

"Australian produce is grown under strict regulation ensuring consumer health is protected. Australian growers are struggling to compete with cheaper imported produce that may not be produced under the same stringent quality controls."

"We have serious concerns that vegetable growers will be under increasing pressure from international markets in the next 10 years."

Australia imported \$842 million worth of vegetables in the 2008-09 financial year, according to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE).

Frozen potatoes and processed tomatoes are our biggest imports, coming primarily from New Zealand, China and Italy.

In the same period, we imported \$991 million worth of fruit, according to ABARE.

Australian fruit growers are also concerned about a recent recommendation by Biosecurity Australia to allow the importation of fresh apples from China.

The recommendation would be subject to quarantine conditions and checks of the pest status of growing areas in China. A main concern among apple growers here is that diseases and pests could contaminate local crops.

Australia imports far more fruits and vegetables than it exports.

In the last financial year, Australia exported \$898 million worth of fruit and \$397 million worth of vegetables.

However, AusVeg said NSW farmers were not as negatively affected by the level of imported produce as farmers in other states.

Their latest research shows 2 per cent of NSW farms reported negative income, compared to more than 20 per cent of farms in South Australia and Victoria.

soil around the Great Divide must be nurtured, and homes could be built in rocky areas.

Mr Burke acknowledged the importance of food being grown locally but would not answer questions about Sydney's farm land being rezoned. Nor would he say whether the federal government should intervene to protect Sydney's agricultural land.

"The food eaten by people in Sydney already comes from all over the nation," Mr Burke said.

NSW Primary Industries Minister Steve Whan said there were "plenty of good reasons to ensure food should continue to be grown here in the Sydney basin."

"The region has the advantage of a mild coastal climate, with a range of suitable soils and access to reliable water supplies, transport, labour and markets," he said.

with Kelly Lane

Fringe farmers feel the squeeze

Debra Jopson

JOE EL BOUSTANI says he grows the "best cherry tomatoes in the world" at Rossmore in Sydney's west but when he sells his farmland, now worth about \$1 million, he cannot imagine where he will set up next.

The practice of farmers buying blocks on the metropolitan fringe at low prices, growing food for decades, then selling the property for a good profit cannot continue because metropolitan land is running out.

Demand for housing is gobbling up land faster than ever, with state government research predicting about 200 vegetable farms will disappear from north-western and south-western Sydney in the next 20 years.

Mr El Boustani wants the government to dedicate specific tracts of

metropolitan land with an agricultural zoning that lasts "forever".

This would mean urban residents would not have to wake to the sound of tractors, while farmers would feel confident about investing millions in infrastructure such as greenhouses.

"Rural land is becoming more



Rural land is becoming scarce. If you go too far away, it is hard to get access to the market.

scarce. If you go too far away, it is hard to get access to the market, especially for fresh food. These are the issues we should be targeting," said Mr El Boustani, who is president of Greenhouse Vegetables NSW.

"You don't want to grow lettuce 100 kilometres away. Then transport and pollution are an issue," he said.

There is plenty of government land that could be earmarked for agriculture and greenhouses mean the amount required is minimal.

"On my five acres, for what I can produce over one year, you would need 10 or 20 times the amount of land for normal agriculture," he said.

"You don't need much land to produce vegetables for Sydney, with new technology and a new way of farming. But we still have to preserve land for that."



Growing concerns ... Joe El Boustani at his Rossmore farm. Photo: Jon Reid

200 vegetable farms will disappear from north and south-west Sydney over the next two decades.

60 breeds of livestock have been reported extinct worldwide since 2000.

INVESTIGATION

of house and homes



Birds in their hand... Cathy Muscat with her daughter, Stephanie, 11, at their Cawdor farm. Photo: Jon Reid

Feathers fly over council complaints

EVERY year James and Cathy Muscat send a million fresh chickens to the Sydney market from their Cawdor farm but they fear that will end due to increasing council restrictions.

After receiving complaints about noise at the farm, Camden Council slapped a curfew on truck movements, which Mr Muscat claimed was crippling business.

The council is now threatening to move a 11pm curfew for trucks to pick up chickens forward to 10pm.

But chickens can be caught only in the cool of the night when they do not move, because heat and the fear of forklifts used to lift them can kill them during the day.

"It is a worldwide practice, because you don't cause any stress on the bird," said Mr Muscat. He said the council curfews made it very tough to get 10,000-25,000 birds ready to take away for processing in a

night. "In summer it doesn't get dark until 9pm and it is physically impossible to do four to five hours' work in that time. In winter, we've been sending in the people who catch the birds earlier," he said.

The farm has existed for more than 30 years. Since the Muscats moved there eight years ago, they have spent \$4 million on building new chicken sheds and upgrading old ones. Mr Muscat said the council started receiving complaints after earthworks machinery began work for construction of a new shed in July 2008.

"When you buy in a rural area, there are farming activities; if you don't like it, don't move there," said Mr Muscat, who believes councils should inform people buying homes near farms nearby about what to expect, including noise and odour.

Unless there was a change of attitude,

Sydney's poultry industry was doomed, as councils no longer gave development approval to chicken sheds. The fresh chickens that Sydneysiders took for granted would no longer be available and the energy-saving boon of poultry only a few food miles from their plates would be lost.

"Last year we went overseas because my wife and I are from Malta and we went back - people in Australia do not appreciate how lucky they are to have such fresh food on their doorstep," he said.

Camden Council's environment and health manager Geoff Green said neighbours had complained about post-midnight noise from the farm. The council aimed to negotiate a solution that would allow the farm to continue without interfering with the "repose" of neighbours.

Debra Jopson

Third crow for chicken industry

SYDNEY'S poultry industry is under so much pressure from urban sprawl and government regulation that it could disappear, the head of a company that processes half a million chickens a week has warned.

"A few years ago we had five companies in Sydney - now there are three, and one announced it is going, so there will only be two of any consequence," said Cordina Chicken Farms chief John Cordina.

"Before long, there will be one and then none."

Companies like Cordina contract farmers to breed chickens in large purpose-built sheds but a third of the farms it deals with have had curfews imposed on them by councils, restricting truck movements.

Residents in new homes creeping across the paddocks to the farms complain about noise and smells - a phenomena driving agriculture out of Sydney.

"You have a Pitt Street farmer who moves in next to you and all they want is the smell of rose petals - it's a disaster," Mr Cordina said, adding the government had tightened odour regulations.

"Getting new farms built in the Sydney Basin is an almost impossible task. When you attempt to get development done, there are so many hoops you have to jump through - particularly in regard to department regulations - it becomes a farce."

A Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics report shows that during the past 10 years chicken production has surged in other states. In NSW, the government suggests about 40 chicken farms will be swallowed by the demand for housing.

Mr Cordina is part of a NSW government agricultural advisory group hoping to stem the urban farm loss.

"Certain things are being looked at, such as creating land corridors to identify areas where agriculture can be allowed to develop without being hampered by these inordinate government regulations."

Debra Jopson

Growing problem needs radical ideas

Debra Jopson

THE nation must completely rethink where and how it grows its food, a prominent scientist and NSW government adviser says.

John Williams, head of the NSW Natural Resources Commission, said we must shift production from the dry inland to the coast and stop development from devouring farms around our cities and large towns.

"With climate change we should have more food produced where more reliable rain is, rather than in the drier country," Dr Williams said. "We have to get it in balance with what the poor old rivers can afford."

It was "daft" to allow urban development to spread over prime food-growing areas such as the Nepean, Hawkesbury and Shoalhaven flood plains and rich agricultural lands such as Kempsey and Grafton.

Dr Williams has a vision of coastal areas covered in intensive fruit and vegetable farms

while the Murray-Darling basin would produce a lower proportion of inedible crops, such as cotton and export crops such as rice.

He said agriculture must halve its water use because the environment could not continue to bear the burden and many areas would become drier as climate change bites.

Water in our rivers was over-allocated to agriculture during the 1950s, '60s and '70s when there was more rain, but a decade of drought showed this wasn't sustainable.

"You can make food a top priority and screw the environment but you can't keep doing it," Dr Williams said.

"You have got to have two-thirds of the water in the river and you can take one-third quite happily. We are taking something like 57 per cent. We've got to adjust the system, but it can take that adjustment."

Our seafood industries also needed nurturing. The way oyster and prawn production in the Hawkesbury and Shoalhaven rivers

suffered as a result of the big dams supplying Sydney with water held a warning: "If we dam a river, we may lose an oyster industry. In the Hunter Valley we have hard issues, because we are losing food production to mining and the groundwater systems are being interfered with. We need it for agriculture."

Agricultural communities in the Murray-Darling basin needed help to shape their future, as the federal government bought water to rescue the environment, he said.

While the Murray-Darling basin had just endured one of its worst droughts, its growers had increased the value of their produce: "Whilst it's been hard on individuals, the elasticity and response of the agricultural sector is remarkable."

Ovp+3Editorial

Extra, Page 16

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The Sun-Herald

For health's sake, stop our precious farmland being gobbled up

THE so-called suburban sprawl that is gouging great chunks of arable land out of the Sydney Basin is a cause for concern.

Figures show that agriculture within a 90-minute drive of the CBD is worth between \$800 million and \$1 billion a year but few Sydneysiders know that at least 10 local councils are so concerned about this valuable farmland being replaced by concrete and bitumen they have pleaded with the federal government to intervene.

Hundreds of poultry farms, market gardens and orchards have

been an important part of the fabric of our city and great contributors to the state's economy. These properties are also an integral part of Sydney's food chain – they produce 10 per cent of all the state's produce as well as providing jobs for about 8500 people.

They are in danger of extinction in a few short years if something is not done to balance the needs of retaining farm land with providing residential blocks for our ever-increasing population. The NSW government has already set aside massive tracts of land in the city's

south-west and north-west for desperately needed housing developments.

If fruit and veg production was to be pushed beyond the city limits there is a danger that food prices could soar as the cost of increased transport overheads are added to the wholesale and retail prices. Experts also say Sydney's climate is good for growing vegetables and to move production to other parts of the state is to gamble with the future vagaries of climate change.

Then there is the spectre of food distributors being forced to import

fruit and vegetables – and its obvious cost implications – to meet consumer demand if production in NSW is cut by a lack of farmland.

Recent studies show that people are not eating the recommended levels of fruit and veg and the number who are overweight and obese is skyrocketing, leading to an increased incidence of lifestyle-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

One study suggested just 20 per cent of children reported eating the five vegetables a day recommended for a healthy lifestyle.

Any hiccup in the chain of supply for fresh fruit and vegetables will only make these statistics worse.

While recognising the desperate need for government to come up with solutions to the city's housing crisis, we ask federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke to make it his priority to ensure that the food supply that comes out of the Sydney Basin remains secure. He must examine the latest intensive farming technologies and help protect our city's great agricultural history.

letters

Nostalgia serves up delicious taste of past

MY FIRST reaction to the wonderful photograph of a smiling Juanita Phillips – "You can have it all, not just all at once" (Extra, May 9) – standing next to the "old pressure cooker" that she found in an op shop, was a wave of intense nostalgia.

As an Australian of Indian background, I grew up with the whistling and hissing sounds of a similar pressure cooker, with the delectable aroma of its contents, mostly lentils and/or chickpeas, wafting through our home.

The article was an eye-opener, a painfully honest and heartfelt exploration of what is real and meaningful in our lives and how much we seem to have lost our way. It is a credit to Ms Phillips that she and her husband have been able to change the way they live through simplifying their lives and not chasing endlessly after material possessions that offer only fleeting moments of happiness.

The message is particularly effective coming as it does from a woman of incredible talent who has achieved a high level of professional and personal success in her lifetime.

Good on you, Juanita, for trying to create a truly happy home for yourself and your family and, in the process, treading a little more lightly on this great planet of ours.

Nitasha Thomson Ettalong Beach

Food for thought

JULIA GILLARD was teased for having a kitchen that didn't look cooked-in.

At least she didn't write a cookbook.

Juanita Phillips's kitchen had the same unused look. Even the pressure cooker on the stove had its new label still attached.

Dr Helen O'Reilly Woolahra

No mercy

CHARLES WATERSTREET'S column "Judge for yourself" (Extra, May 9)

is an eye-opener. Now compare this judgment to that which Justice Einfeld received from the full bench of the Court of Criminal Appeal. In Diane Brimble's death, the judge dropped the manslaughter charge against Mark Wilhelm after he pleaded guilty to supplying drugs to Brimble.

The judge recorded no conviction and applied no penalty, stating: "It's a significant punishment he has already suffered... I am entitled to take into account not only the years of public humiliation of the offender but also the consequences of that on him and his mental health."

I don't understand the justice system. Justice Einfeld has a lengthy CV of doing good to society – nationally and internationally – over the years, and at age 71 is suffering from various illnesses. As if Justice Einfeld hasn't suffered enough public humiliation, but there is no mercy.

It looks like radio shock jocks are running the criminal penalty system in this state.

Mukul Desai Hunters Hill

Burden of proof

IN HIS discussion of the adverse judgment in the Marcus Einfeld appeal, Charles Waterstreet seems to have ignored the possibility that the judgment was as much about the credibility of the medical evidence as that of Einfeld himself.

Gordon Koch Cherrybrook

Squall tales

JOE HOCKEY complains that Kevin Rudd intends to charge mining companies a "resources rent tax" to pay off the budget deficit left in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Well heaven forbid, pay off the deficit? How reckless. Or perhaps Mr Abbott's solution to the problem is to sell Medibank Private, like a panicked sailor heaving cargo over the side of the ship would be a better option?

But arrrrh, them threats by the mining industry to take their business elsewhere ain't sea monsters, Mr Abbott, they be just squalls, me hearty.

Liam O'Neill North Gosford

Miracle required

ALEX MITCHELL – "Trobeidi warriors cut from Xena script" (May 9) quotes Canberra lobbyist Eric Walsh as saying NSW Labor could put up Mary MacKillop, Don Bradman and Phar Lap for the next election and still lose. Like NSW Labor, they're all dead.

At least Phar Lap's heart is on display, which is more than anyone can say for NSW Labor of the Trobeidi era. The Don would have let Mitchell's "burning question" go through to the keeper, but the Blessed Mary MacKillop may yet intercede in developments: only a miracle can save the ALP now.

Scott Poynting Manchester (UK)

Watch it, sonny

I WAS appalled and very unsettled by Rachel Ward's article "Caught in the lies that blind" (Extra, May 9).

Mothers who make doormats of themselves make it extraordinarily difficult for women following in their wake. Overindulged, self-absorbed, pampered and spoilt

men on the whole make notoriously bad husbands. I am the grandmother of two grandsons. If I ever hear them speaking to anyone, let alone their mother ("Get away from me you freak") like that, I will give them such a hiding they won't be able to sit down for a week and I don't care how old or big they are. Where is the respect?

Elizabeth Kroon Emu Plains

Message for Gretel

AS THE mother of three sons, one of whom is gay, I was very cross with Gretel Killean's inference that only gay children would send a list of sentimental songs for Mother's Day – "Messages of love, near and far" (May 9).

Any of my sons could do the same. I think she should retract that statement, with an apology to our gay community.

Name and address withheld

Courting trouble

A CLASS action against the banks should not be allowed. How can the



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

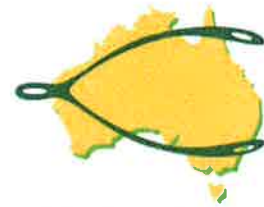
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Responsibility for election comment in this issue is taken by Simon Dulhunty, 1 Darling Island Road, Pyrmont, 2009.

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**Australian Chicken Meat
Federation (ACMF) Inc**

3 June 2010

Metropolitan Strategy Review
Department of Planning
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Email: metrostrategy@planning.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Need for a clear strategy in support of the chicken meat industry in NSW

The Australian Chicken Meat Federation Inc., on behalf of its members, would like to express its strong support of the clearly argued submission by Mr John Cordina on behalf of Cordina Chicken Farms Pty Ltd/Summertime Chicken Pty Ltd and Red Lea Chickens Pty Ltd, dated 24 May 2010.

ACMF represents all elements of the Australian chicken meat industry, including chicken growers and processors at the national level. Members of the Federation are the five State Chicken Meat Councils, the Australian Chicken Growers' Council and the Australian Poultry Industries Association, the latter representing the chicken meat processors.

The chicken meat industry is Australia's largest meat industry on a domestic per person consumption basis. A highly efficient and vertically integrated industry, it has developed steadily over the past 50 years to an annual turnover now of around \$2.7 billion on an asset base of \$6 billion and employs 40,000 people directly and 120,000 in total throughout Australia.

The industry has a strong base in NSW but, as detailed in Mr Cordina's submission, the strength has been and continues to be eroded by strategic moves by other states, in particular South Australia, and the lack of an adequate consideration by the Government of NSW of this important industry.

There needs to be a long-term strategic plan for the chicken meat industry providing certainty and ensuring reasonable and ongoing access to land for agricultural pursuits in the Sydney Basin. The poultry industry represents a significant economic contributor in many regional communities and its importance as a supplier of meat protein in an environment of climate change, increased food demand and a strong call for sustainability, is likely to grow substantially over coming years and decades.

From our experience over recent years, the single most significant factor threatening and holding back our industry is the difficulty in obtaining development approvals for the expansion of existing enterprises or new farms. This is aggravated by the constant and increasing pressure on existing operations by the urban spread into areas of established agricultural zones.

ACMF believes that there is clear and substantial mutual benefit in the NSW Government ensuring that our industry can continue to prosper in this State. For this reason, we urge you to take action in line with the proposal submitted by Cordina Chicken Farms Pty Ltd and Red Lea Chickens Pty Ltd.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andreas Dubs', written in a cursive style.

Dr Andreas Dubs
Executive Director

cc: Premier, Kristina Keneally: premier@www.nsw.gov.au
Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell: lop@parliament.nsw.gov.au