Appendix 12

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

As a resident of the Hawkesbuy Basin and Lecturer in Horticulture at the University of Western Sydney for the past 30 years, I have been asked for my opinion re the profitability and future of five acre rural lots in the Galston area.

Lots of this size have been commonly available on the fringe of the Sydney Metropolitan area for many years, many supporting agronomic ventures of live stocking and cropping and were in many cases supported by tax relief or subsidized in numerous ways. This type of venture can no longer be seen as viable in its own right, unless specialized niche opportunities are sought which in most instances require large capital input such as greenhouses, hydroponics etc.

The days of orchard and vegetable growing on such areas, where payment for all labour input is met from the venture are now gone. Some intense market gardening still exists however, if one were to calculate the true cost of labour these would be considered unprofitable. As a commercial orchardist myself at Nambucca Heads on the North Coast of N.S.W., I am fully aware of the commercial pressures now faced in such enterprises and in rare instances would five acres be a viable farm. When you consider that you have a house, sheds, roadways, dam etc. there is little left to cultivate. Once in the case of stone fruit, you could just choose to grow the best varieties, this is no longer that simple, you now have to grow the best fruit to certain standards and pay production royalties. Stone fruit is now a good example where tree and production royalties are in place and are quickly becoming the norm. The commercial agents of new varieties don't want five acre farmers, as it is too difficult to manage consistent quality parameters and is considered inefficient.

I could also go to great lengths with the issues faced by suburbia or fringe suburbia with the activities of farmers. Noise, tractors and diesel engines, the smell from fertilizers such as poultry manure/dynamic lifter, especially when it gets wet, pesticide usage and runoff, and the burning of prunings etc. The Hawkesbury City Council have an excellent example where a mushroom compost manufacturer is trying to make a profit in close proximity to urbanization. A 500 tree orchard of stone fruit at $5/tray and 10 trays per tree equates to a gross income of only $25,000, hardly enough to pay the expenses

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let along call it a living. Unfortunately the high prices for early stone fruit have now moved to Queensland and Northern N.S.W. where they are grown the earliest, the same for example happened with tomatoes once grown at Mona Vale Sydney, now grown in Queensland. The price opportunity no longer exists for such areas as they are now glutted mid-season. with poor prices for their product.

I would be happy to further comment on the issue I have raised and am personally very mindful of the demise of such industry in, and around urbanization.

Yours sincerely,

G. D. Richards.

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Curator Fruit and Nut Crops,
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N.B. Now federal taxation laws relating to what legally constitutes a primary producer may be a good place to start when addressing the above issue along with the new water reform policies of the N.S.W. state government etc.