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MEDIA RELEASE

Time to diversify, increase production of urban fringe farmland

The Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network has proposed additional measures to protect and further develop Sydney's urban fringe farming industry. The proposals build upon those foreshadowed by NSW Primary Industries Minister, Steve Whan, at the Food Security and Health forum in Western Sydney this week.

"After setting aside urban fringe agricultural land for farming in perpetuity, the next step would be to investigate how the range of fresh foods produced there could be diversified and how production could be increased.

"This would make Sydney less reliant on food imports and boost the regional farming economy and the jobs it sustains", said the Network's NSW spokesman, Russ Grayson.

An initiative with potential to build the regional food economy would be to develop a 'Sydney Grown' label to identify food produced within reasonably close distance of the city and to help in the marketing of locally produced food.

"People say they want to buy local food but there is no way to identify it in the shops", said Mr Grayson. "A Sydney Grown label would be an effective way to create a market for those who want to support local farmers and to buy fresh food".

Another initiative would be to legislate the 'right to farm'. This would ensure that farming takes precedent over the complaints of people moving into new housing developments.

"Complaints about the noise and odours associated with farming can be a barrier to farming operations on the urban fringe that contribute to Sydney's food security", said Mr Grayson.

Network proposal vindicated

Mr Whan told the Food Security and Health forum that the NSW Government is committed to ensuring the Sydney Basin retains an agricultural industry that is better protected from urban development. He announced the NSW Government has formed an interagency working group to draft an options paper to improve the Department of Planning's Metropolitan Strategy.

"This vindicates what we said in the Network's submission to the Department of Planning's review of the Metropolitan Strategy", said Mr Grayson.

The Network proposed the NSW Government commission a land capability study of urban fringe land to identify prime agricultural land and protect it for farming with planning legislation. Marginal agricultural land could be used for urban development or for other uses."

The Minister and the Network are in agreement that the production of fresh, perishable food on Sydney's urban fringe farmland supports a significant workforce, and that securing farmland for the continuation of farming and diversifying and increasing production is critical to the city being able to feed itself as Sydney's population grows over coming decades.

The proposal to retain urban fringe farmland comes at a time when there are increasing calls to recognise and act on the value of a food system that produces fresh food close to the city.

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