

## **MEDIA RELEASE** Date of release 27 February 2014

### **FIND COMMON INTERESTS INSTEAD OF CRITICISING, SAYS NETWORK**

Community gardeners have reacted with consternation to AUSVEG's criticisms of the community gardens they use to provide food for their families and to socialise with others in healthy, outdoor recreation.

"It is unfortunate that AUSVEG makes unfounded criticisms of our community gardens and that they applaud the federal government's axing of the community grants scheme that would have benefited not only community gardeners but a range of food-related initiatives", said vice-president of the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network (ACFCGN), Jane Mowbray.

"AUSVEG's move appears to be an attempt to drive a wedge between those engaging in community food systems like community gardens and farmers markets, and commercial horticulturists.

"The reality is that many community gardeners are great supporters of Australian farmers and buy their products.

"Like AUSVEG, we are interested in biosecurity too, however the reality is that community gardens have been in existence for decades without being a biosecurity threat to farmers or anyone else because there are often trained horticulturists and experienced gardeners who are members.

"What is interesting is why AUSVEG chose to criticise community gardeners, who grow for their own consumption and not for the market, rather than seek a better deal for Australian horticulturists from the supermarkets and seek safeguards for growers from what could be an influx of imported fruit and vegetables with the proposed free trade deal.

"Australians have a tradition and a right to grow some of the food they eat, whether that's in their own backyard or together with friends in a community garden, and that's exactly what they are doing".

Community gardening has now become so popular that local and state governments have policies to assist people starting and managing the gardens, and churches and schools have become involved and are actively involved in promoting healthy eating nation wide. For decades the gardens have been established features in Australia's towns and cities. The gardens attract a broad demographic, ranging from people in comfortable middle class suburbs, to rural towns and social housing estates.

"While the gardens provide some of the food their members eat, experience shows that they have an important social role as venues where people can come together to work on something of mutual benefit and get to know people living in their area", said Ms Mowbray.

"This valuable social role appears to have been something that AUSVEG is unaware of or that it chooses to ignore.

"We now have community workers making use of community gardens and schools have built them too, but those valuable roles aren't all. Community gardens are great places to learn and it's this learning, and the diversity of gardening knowledge you find among the gardeners, that reduces the incidence of plant disease and pests and makes most gardens well maintained places".

"We're happy to talk about the values of community gardening with AUSVEG", said Ms Mowbray, "and find areas where we can cooperate to further support both commercial horticulturists and community and school gardeners."

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