

Briefing Paper

To

Blue Mountains City Council Sustainability Reference Group

From

The Blue Mountains Food Forum

Introduction

The purpose of this briefing paper is to communicate the outcomes of the Blue Mountains Food Forum held on July 18 2009 at the Mid Mountains Community Centre in Lawson. On that day, over 60 people came together to articulate their desire for a food system which was equitable and sustainable. The Forum itself was one of 5 regional forums being held around the Sydney Region in the Lead up to the Food Summit on October 22/23 2009. The purpose of this summit is to table policy ideas at the state level for a fair and sustainable food system for NSW.

More information about the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance and the Food Summit 2009 can be found at www.sydneyfoodfairness.org.

Many ideas came out of the Blue Mountains Forum that are of immediate relevance to the local Blue Mountains Community and to Blue Mountains City Council. For this reason we have asked to have the opportunity to brief the BMCC Sustainability Reference Group.

The full list of outcomes are on our website (<http://sites.google.com/site/sfabmforum/>) but the following summary distills the discussions of the various subgroups on the day.

1. Headline Statements

The following points represent widely and deeply held views of attendees at the Forum, as to the significance of the food that we eat not only for ourselves as individuals but also for our community and our environment. This relates not only to the ecological impacts of food production, processing, transport and distribution, but also to the equity and fairness of such food systems, and the role that all aspects of our food systems can play in building healthy and resilient communities.

We believe that the significance of these sentiments includes the recognition that there are many positive reasons to embrace and celebrate a local food culture as well as a response to threats such as climate change, peak oil, concentration of control, community health etc.

We ask the BMCC Sustainability Reference Group consider these sentiments as a contribution to guiding principles when formulating future policies that relate or pertain to food policy

- *Recognise that Food can express & strengthen community spirit and values. Awareness that community can access, partake & eat food, and that it is a social activity. Building skills in co-operation, people care, land care, health, social and ecological sustainability*

- *Recognise that Community Gardens can be a vital focal point for above aspirations, particularly when used to increase broader community involvement, link gardens with community groups e.g. neighbourhood centres, disability, disadvantaged, youth, donations to food services and banks, community education and skilling, community lunches at neighbourhood centre etc*
- *Support small scale food production in the Blue Mountains region aligned with unique Blue Mountains situation – urban organic sustainable agriculture without compromising natural systems*
- *Coordinate existing and new groups/organisations that facilitate & promote grass roots action. There are many existing groups already active in this area, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel – facilitate resource sharing and acknowledging what/who already exists – work together, develop community ties, sharing.*
- *A Possible Permanent Local Food networking support and resource organisation - Blue Mountains Food Working Party – council?*
- *Support and expand current initiatives undertaken by various groups around cooking classes*
- *Explicit GE free policy at all levels of government*
- *Make use of Neighbourhood Centres as a starting spot for a community garden*

The BM Forum requests that the BMCC adopt the following Bill of Rights (Ethics of Food)

As Residents of the Blue Mountains Region, we have the following rights

- *To produce our own food*
- *To know the source and contents of our food (comprehensive labelling)*
- *To have access to a wide variety of nutritious foods*
- *To save and sow our seed without genetic or other interference*
- *To a fair and equitable share of water resources (including collection of rainwater)*
- *And our responsibility is not to take more than our fair share*

2. Access to Food

The context for these points is that in the discussion on local, sustainable and healthy food systems, we ensure that we are inclusive of all groups in our community – eg those on benefits, aged or disabilities, transport disadvantaged

(We acknowledge that BMCC have already launched a policy on food sustainability within council.)

We have identified a need for an integration role for council to support, enhance and enable networking between government and NGOs and community groups operating on issues of equity, health and sustainable food in the mountains.

The following examples were discussed at the Forum

- *Maximise using community transport to take those with no transport and poor public transport to markets/f and shops ie like in residential village*
- *Local buying and share shopping groups to be developed at a local level and supported and encouraged by Council.*
- *Council to provide incentives for local Fruit & Vegetable vendors and the Food Co-op to provide vouchers as part of the Emergency Food Relief system.*

- *Coordinated and collaborative services for transport disadvantaged residents.*
- *The resource “Free and Cheap Meals” compiled by Brian Harrington has been updated, and is available to Non-Government Organisations for general local distribution via the web. Council support on this is requested.*
- *The Food price comparison resource developed by Brian Harrington to be made available to Non-Government Organisations for distribution via the web. This will assist inexperienced shoppers on low income to make significant savings when shopping. For example a SupermarketWatch website*

3. Support of local groups

The context for these points is that there are many groups, Council agencies, and community groups working around the issues of food, sustainable local production, distribution, and community education. However there is little integration of and communication between these various groups is ad hoc or non-existent. The mission of the groups overlap, are duplicated and often situations of one group having to reinvent what is being done successfully by another group.

We have identified a need for the employment of a sustainable food officer to co-ordinate food strategies across the mountains. Once employed the Council worker could then, in partnership with welfare agencies and local groups, set up public meetings in every town across the Mountains. Local groups could then identify strategies relevant to their particular community (eg. neighbourhood buying groups etc) and the Council worker could support the development of these strategies (it would form the basis of his/her work plan).

- *Establish a working group re lobbying – to co-ordinate the views of various groups*
- *Approach the Blue Mountains Gazette to regularly allocate a section in their paper to healthy eating and local needs*
- *Council to be approached and councillors lobbied to employ a sustainable food officer to co-ordinate food strategies across the mountains Once employed the Council worker could then, in partnership with local groups, set up public meetings in every town across the Mountains. Local groups could then identify strategies relevant to their particular community (eg. neighbourhood buying groups etc) and the Council worker to support the development of these strategies (it would form the basis of his/her work plan).*
- *Have a specific government representative for community gardens i.e. local council community development worker*

4. Education skills and knowledge, mentoring

Awareness of the local regional and global significance of our food systems is growing rapidly in our community. Many attendees at the Forum expressed the desire to support, enhance and broaden the development of this awareness through a variety of means.

- *Recognise that Community Gardens can be a vital focal point for above aspirations, particularly when used to increase broader community involvement, link gardens with community groups e.g. neighbourhood centres, disability, disadvantaged, youth, donations to food services and banks, community education and skilling, community lunches at neighbourhood centre etc*
- *Build awareness of the impact that our current industrialized food system has on the environment, and the the latest research showing the potential for improvement that an*

increase in the proportion of locally produced food might have. Target 20% of population buying/eating local by 2020

- *Emphasise approach to food production via benefits, rewards, enjoyment, passion*
- *Workshops neighbourhood centre to offer workshops on how to find funding for community food groups*
- *It would be useful to identify and support what local schools are doing in terms of cooking skills, community gardens etc. Also to encourage more school excursions to farms etc to promote knowledge about sustainable food production*
- *Identify information (apparently there is some information on the web!) about the locations of feral fruit trees.*
- *Support and encourage opportunities for parents and their children to cook together and disseminate quick and easy family recipes using local produce.*
- *Campaign for acceptance of food with blemishes, unsized etc. – one way through growers markets*
- *Develop links between TAFE, community and producers re mentoring and/or work experience*
- *Encourage local schools to fundraise with garden produce rather than produce.*

5. Distribution

Attendees at the Forum articulated the need to develop new and innovative means of distributing food within our community – from the producers to the consumers, gardeners to neighbours.

- *Cooperatives cooperating for more effective distribution, active collaboration, collaboration within and between non money cooperatives*
- *Encouragement and support for development of food coops across the mountains, in line with these strategies*
- *Facilitation of distribution with local transport*
- *Establish local food distribution centre*
- *Develop innovative ways to distribute food locally – local garden Exchange, Local Food Coop, Local Food Networks*
- *Support and encourage neighbourhood food swapping and local produce.*
- *How do we tap in to local growers excess and distribute it.*
- *Understand and relate proactively to food from outside immediate region eg central west farmers, farmers markets. Urgent need for an association of small regional producers to identify barriers to growth in that sector. Including contact with markets, transport, sharing costs.*
- *Fresh food banks – encouragement of donation of surplus fresh food for use by welfare groups – how to maintain freshness.*

6. Planning

Several discussions at the Forum focused on the central importance of local planning regulations in enabling 'urban agriculture'. Housing developments can and do exist side by side with chemical free food production in many parts of the world, to the benefit of both.

- *Vacant Council land be rezoned for Community Gardens*
- *Lobby Council re DCPs Development Control Plans - specific information on BMCC website*
- *Eat the View – plant fruit trees*
- *Expand Sustainability StreetsReuse public water system – grey water/storm water*
- *Access many community gardens accessible to all regions of mountains*
- *Co-ordinated council plan for local food growers and community projects – with input from community but council supply funding. Local examples - study of Land release criteria for old Lawson Golf Course*
- *Heritage of Fruit growing in our region - now abandoned and neglected,*
- *Fruit/nut tree register = registration, education and promotion of new possibilities eg edible landscapes and public places.*
- *Council to explore and implement the planting of edible plants in public areas and to support local groups doing the same. Not just edible plants but edible natives performing supportive function around food productions areas (eg local native zone 5)*
- *In addition to the promotion of community gardens across the mountains, the concept of street gardens is to be developed eg. footpath, verge gardens, general fruit tree and herb plantings.*
- *Identify and disseminate information on wild foods.*