



# Capital Food and Fibre Strategy

## REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

The ACT Government is developing a Capital Food and Fibre Strategy to guide future planning and management of our region's agriculture production.

The ACT is building a new approach to how and where we produce and source our food and fibre. The development of the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy will help the ACT to transition towards ecologically sustainable production systems that are resilient and help protect and restore our regional soils, waterways and biodiversity. It will build local food systems that strengthen access for everyone to fresh, healthy and affordable food, provide incentives and economic opportunities including job creation, and support strong community participation and inclusion.

The Strategy also responds to the increased interest in the availability of local food, heightened by the recent COVID-19 and natural disasters induced supply chain problems.

This project is jointly funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the ACT Government.

## THE CONVERSATION

To start the conversation with the Canberra community, we released a discussion paper. It proposed a future vision for the ACT and Capital Region's food and fibre production, and some goals that could help to achieve that vision.

The discussion paper brought together the ACT Government's vision for social, economic and environmental growth of our city; learnings from other Australian and international cities on urban agriculture and food production systems; and sense-checked against the changing climate we, and the world, are facing, as most recently evidenced in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report.

The discussion paper was available for comment through the ACT Government's YourSay Conversations Capital Food and Fibre Strategy page from early December 2021 to the end of February 2022. During this consultation period, we held two workshops in November 2021, one for rural and the other for urban stakeholders across the food and fibre supply chains. We also conducted one-on-one interviews with a wide range of people and took brochures to food markets and co-ops to encourage submissions.

## WHO WE ENGAGED

Input was encouraged from all stakeholders, but feedback was sought in particular from individuals and associations across the rural and urban food and fibre supply chains, predominantly those who reside within the ACT, but also representatives of the broader Capital Region.

As food and fibre are part of everyone's lives, we spoke with individuals, businesses and associations representing both urban and rural areas, with those operating in research and development, production, processing/manufacturing, or retail. The Canberra community was invited to contribute through the Yoursay page.

Those who provided input included the following peak bodies and community groups: ACT for Bees, ACT Rural Landholders Association, ACT Multicultural Advisory Council, ACT Natural Resources Management, Australian Agricultural Centre, Agribusiness Regional Development Association, Australian National University (several areas), Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, Canberra Permaculture Design and Education, Canberra Organic Growers Society, Canberra Region Joint Organisation, Canberra Seed Savers, Conservation Council, Centre for Entrepreneurial Agritechology, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee, Dietitians Australia, Landcare ACT, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, ACT Regional Development Association, Slow Food Canberra, Soil City Cooperative Farms,



Sustain Australia, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation, University of Canberra, Weston Creek Community Council, Yarra City Council, Wingecaribbee Shire Council.

In addition, we would like to sincerely thank all the businesses and individuals who contributed their views and ideas through workshops, interviews or submissions.

In developing this Listening Report, we used a thematic analysis to identify the most common patterns of feedback within the workshop and interview transcripts, written submissions and the responses from the Yoursay Conversations. The following section provides a high-level summary of the key insights that have emerged from the feedback, grouped according to the Vision and Goals as presented in the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy discussion paper.

## Key insights from the community

### Overarching comments

1. There is strong community support for the development of the Strategy. Responders noted that, after bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a good time to focus government and community attention on food security and the importance of local produce.
2. The proposed vision and goals for the Strategy were generally accepted. Many submissions noted however that the Strategy needs an understanding of the current food production and consumption patterns within the Territory and clear, measurable targets and metrics so that its success can be assessed.
3. The Strategy should acknowledge and bring together the many existing policies, programs and operators across the food/fibre production and consumption domains in the ACT and the broader region, to create real momentum.
4. The Strategy should ensure that in seeking to build local food security and markets, particular focus is given to delivering affordable and equitable access to fresh, nutritious food.

*“We agree with the Strategy paper’s overall vision... Our vision is to enable regenerative and agroecological farms to thrive. This has taken on an added salience in the face of the increasing impacts of the climate crisis and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Australians care more than ever about the way their food is produced and how and where they can access it, with a growing awareness of its social, environmental, and economic impacts.”*

#### Farmer-led civil society organisation

*“Our vision for the ACT would be to see the majority of food grown and sourced locally and in ecologically-sound and socially-just ways by setting objectives to be delivered by underlying strategies with a specific percentage target by a specific date.”*

#### Related organisation

*“Remember that food security is just not about the price of food. Rent, salary, ie what is the income [has impact what people can afford].”*

#### University research group

### Proposed Goal 1: Transition to ecologically sustainable food and fibre production supported by strong environmental stewardship to ensure our region has healthy soils, water and air.

1. The existing efforts—particularly of rural landholders—to adopt regenerative practices should be acknowledged. There should be recognition and support for those that transition towards better environmental outcomes.
2. Availability of land in both urban and rural areas was noted as a key challenge for food and fibre production in the ACT.
3. Many stakeholders see current lease arrangements and zoning restrictions as barriers to investment in production and land stewardship.



4. Several stakeholders called for comprehensive soil quality mapping for the ACT and a subsequent protection of fertile soils.
5. Stakeholders had divergent views on urban agriculture. On one hand, existing community gardens and urban farms are seen as positive and popular developments that should be expanded. On the other hand, some expressed doubt on whether urban production could significantly contribute to the ACT's food security.
6. There was support for incorporating First Nations' knowledge of land, water and fire management practices. It was acknowledged that this component of the Strategy needs a clear focus, and it should be First Nations led. Stakeholders also expressed interest in learning more about traditional food and fibre growing and contemporary First Nations-led enterprises.

*"Indicators of soil health, water quality and ecosystem resilience are the key. But the condition the land is in and what is being produced, need to be considered for what should be done and when"*

**Related organisation**

*"I think it's really important to be able to access knowledge from Ngunnawal people. How can we retain cultural intellectual property and recompense Ngunnawal people for the sharing of that knowledge, while also supporting their development and skill development in agricultural pursuits as well?"*

**Urban workshop participant**

*"A commonly held view among ACT farmers is that without changes to planning, regulations and lease duration in certain locations the strategy may struggle to gain credibility."*

**Yoursay**

**Proposed Goal 2: Build the drought and climate change resilience of the ACT farm sector by identifying and encouraging practices that best fit the region's conditions.**

1. Many stakeholders acknowledged climate change and its potential negative impacts to the future of farming, but some also noted that they don't have enough understanding of what the future holds for the ACT and the region.
2. Several responders would prefer a holistic approach to managing climate risks and associated impacts of extreme weather patterns such as drought, rather than focusing on drought as a stand-alone issue.
3. As expected, the future availability of water was seen as a key issue for drought resilience in both urban and rural environments. Stakeholders mentioned issues such as investigation of existing water allocations, water planning and management including wastewater recycling and increased water capture as something the Strategy should include.
4. Many stakeholders emphasised the importance of soil health and soil carbon in improving water retention capacity and, as such, building drought resilience.
5. Diversity, including biodiversity, and diversity of crop varieties, business models etc were noted as important builders of resilience.

*"When it's raining, you don't need water, but to be able to store a lot of water for when it's not raining is, I think, imperative to being able to produce food going forward."*

**Urban Workshop Participant**

*"Focus on increased living infrastructure - especially with relation to building soil health, increasing shade and utilising storm and flood water in clever ways to hold moisture in the soil for longer. This can be achieved through the ACT Living Infrastructure Plan and the current action and future initiatives relating to it. A living city should be promoted holistically across all sectors of the ACT."*

**Yoursay**



*“With resilience we are talking about system level disruption, whether it be droughts or bushfires or COVID-19, I just wonder if there is some usefulness and actually broaden the goal to talk about resilience to system level disruption, rather than just specifically focusing on the drought.”*

**Urban workshop participant**

*“Capture carbon in the soil which increases water holding capacity and reduces flooding.”*

**Yoursay**

### **Proposed Goal 3: Increase the capacity to produce food and fibre locally to shorten supply chains and reduce reliance on external supply**

1. While some stakeholders wanted to see more food grown in the ACT, they also acknowledged that we would continue to be reliant on food produced elsewhere. It is important for the ACT to work together with the surrounding NSW local governments in building a strong, regional food system. We need to better understand what producers can grow in the ACT and nearby regions, and if there are regulations in the ACT that are barriers.
2. In addition to increased food production, many noted that collection, aggregation, processing and transport solutions are needed to increase food security.
3. Many submissions called for more Community Supported Agriculture and other ways that directly connect producers and consumers. In general, people wanted to support both commercial food and fibre businesses as well as not-for-profit operations. Both have value in the food system.
4. Many submissions saw a role for the ACT Government in raising awareness of local produce by informing and educating consumers including through visible ‘local’ branding and marketing campaigns and encouraging retailers to stock local produce.

*“The lack of ACT based producers represented at the Farmers’ Markets illustrates the shortage of producers in the ACT and it also highlights the opportunities. If a producer is willing to travel three or four hours to sell their products at the Canberra farmers market, then the consumer market is there. We just need to make sure that we’ve got the producers to supply the food.”*

**Rural workshop participant**

*“Enable zoning for smaller, localised food production and associated processing and distribution infrastructure including on-farm and cooperative abattoirs for large and small animals.”*

**Yoursay**

*“I strongly believe there is firm support in the Canberra community for immediate action and startups working towards a healthier, more resilient, local food system utilising CSA (community supported agriculture).”*

**Urban workshop participant**

### **Proposed Goal 4: Support innovation in the food and fibre sector through the adoption of diverse practices, business models and new technology.**

1. Many stakeholders commented that there are other ways to innovate in addition to technology-driven approaches. Costs for adopting high technology solutions can be prohibitive and risky for many farmers and gardeners, and that’s why “low-tech” ideas should not be ignored.
2. The availability and accessibility of land is a concern for food production, particularly in the urban areas. Many responders suggested developing innovative ways to share land or adopting production systems that use land more



effectively. Again, stakeholders noted that they don't all need to be high-tech solutions – various approaches should be supported.

3. Innovation is needed to address the workforce problem, how to attract and retain skilled workers and make it easier to directly connect producers and consumers.
4. Education, like peer-to-peer learning and demonstrations for innovation were also promoted as a way for producers to learn about innovative practices and business models.

*“Bring together farmers and agritech experts to promote diversification and knowledge sharing.”*

**Yoursay**

*“Establish a forum where innovators and farmers can work together, learn from each other and understand issues and barriers to facilitate the transition”.*

**Yoursay**

*“Government should adopt and implement the Heart Foundation’s Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design principles, and enable land sharing platforms.”*

**Community group**

### **Proposed Goal 5: Enhance participation, knowledge exchange, employment opportunities and financial viability across the food and fibre supply chain.**

1. Many stakeholders consider that getting people involved in agriculture and food production and increasing education and skills are the key for this goal and the success of the Strategy. Teaching about growing and eating healthy food should start at primary school. Many commented on the lack of suitable courses or degrees, particularly in productive horticulture.
2. There should be a way to bring different farming groups together – to link old and young farmers, rural and urban operators, landowners and those interested in cultivating etc. This would help broaden the diversity of food production and facilitate knowledge and skills transfer.
3. Community gardens are broadly supported by Canberrans. Many stakeholders wanted to see more of them and include gardens, with attached amenities like cooking facilities routinely in the plans for new suburbs.
4. Stakeholders acknowledge that the ACT’s food system needs more participation from our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. These communities need to be invited and empowered to participate, and the activities should be led by their members.

*“An associate diploma course in production horticulture at CIT would be a good step forward. This would provide a starting point for young people contemplating a career in food production.”*

**Yoursay submission**

*“Enabling younger generations to gain skills and experience to generate agricultural enterprises begins with instilling values of sustainability and self-sufficient food production early on, through school kitchen garden and sustainability programs. Creating pathways for people who have been through these school programs would be a good start.”*

**Community group**

*“There are migrant groups in ACT who have farming background and traditions, and would be keen and able to utilise a piece of land for growing vegetables.”*



## Community group

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Feedback received on the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy discussion paper, and in additional discussions is currently being considered and will inform the development of the draft Strategy. It is anticipated that the draft Strategy will be released for community feedback in late 2022.

During consultation, we received valuable information about how the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy could be implemented. This information will be kept for the development of the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy Implementation Plan.

If you have any questions or want to learn more about this project, please contact the Agriculture Strategy team by email [cbrfoodfibre@act.gov.au](mailto:cbrfoodfibre@act.gov.au)

To find out more about the status of the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra visit [www.yoursay.act.gov.au/food-and-fibre](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au/food-and-fibre).

### Key Timings

**December 2021 – February 2022: community and industry consultation open**

**June 2022: Listening Report published.**

We are here

**March – Mid 2022: Draft Capital Food and Fibre Strategy developed**

**Late 2022: Draft Capital Food and Fibre Strategy released for feedback**

**December 2022: Final Capital Food and Fibre Strategy released**

**Early – mid 2023: Implementation Plan developed**

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

**1,409**

Yoursay Conversations page received 2,401 visits from 1,409 unique visitors

**106**

The discussion paper received 106 contributions from 44 contributors in Yoursay

**40**

We received 40 written submissions.

**16,200**

We reached a social media audience of almost 16,200.

**170**

In workshops, interviews and presentations we spoke with almost 170 individuals