

‘Food Security’ discussion group
“Faith on Earth’ event the Wetlands Centre 23/9/11

What are the issues?

- Australia is a country capable of producing more food than its population needs.
- What is Australia’s moral obligation to the rest of the world?
- Should we curtail other nations buying our land?
- How far should we go to encourage and increase agricultural production?
- Are all activities such as: Genetical modification, factory farming, free trade, energy efficiency and food standards, the trend to agribusiness, national, multinational or corporate ownership of the food chain acceptable to pursue?
- What are the moral spiritual and ethical issues associated with food production and distribution that should shape our thinking?
- Should Australia seek to secure a vibrant food system that is diverse, equitable and resilient which supports our wellbeing and is socially, economically and ecologically durable and productive?
- Should the church be contributing to the Federal Government “Food Policy” discussion?

What are the different views in the debate?

- Australia needs to produce quality food for our own population.
- Imported food does not have the same standards of production. Standards are required and set in Australia for production, for treatment for pests diseases, for storage, for packaging.
- To maintain and meet these standards food items produced in Australia will be dearer in the supermarket.
- Consumers are not discriminating in buying Australian products but are strictly price driven in their purchases and supermarkets are exploiting this and importing food.

- Australia needs to maintain ownership of its land for agricultural production.
- Australia can benefit with overseas investment in land because it makes Australia a client colony that is worth protecting against monopoly or takeover by any one nation or group.

- The monopoly in Australian supermarkets means prices are dictated to producers.
- Monopolies, Multinational and Transnational food production and retailing corporations are bigger and more powerful than National governments and can pressure against national interests
- Independent and small producers and retailers are dearer but more flexible sustainable and contribute to local economies more than large corporations.
- Equity of distribution will find its own balance and level setting price and quality.

What are the narratives underlying the debate?

- Older residents and migrants remember times of food shortage, (wars, disasters) and local production was the only survival strategy that coped with such world disruption.
- Younger generations have never experienced food shortages in their lifetime.
- Food purchases are a declining percentage of the average weekly expenditure and people don't want it to change because they regard the reduced expenditure as creating discretionary money for other lifestyle items.
- Maximising production volume is the driving force encouraged by research and educationalists. This has never included social and environmental issues because these are less able to be quantified and measured.
- Since the war, choice and availability are increasing consumer demands regardless of season and increasing with the growing multicultural tastes of the population.

- Centralised selling and purchasing was a strategy sought by small growers and retailers to be able to compete against larger growers and corporations. It was the only way Australian farmers could compete against oversea subsidized farm production.
- Large corporations have been dismantling such systems and vertically integrating production processing and retailing excluding the cost of negotiating with small producers and becoming better able to provide a standardize product demanded by consumers.
- There is an inequality in power between small and large retailers and producers that has grown with the need to become larger to survive.

What is God calling the church to do in the public sphere on this issue?

- To be a prophetic voice to speak out in defence of:
 - local food production;
 - of the small producer and retailer,
 - of the equitable distribution of our food overseas so as not to disenfranchise local national farmers.

- To use people power to support local produced products.

- To encourage and support farm producer groups and retailers that are counting the social and environmental cost of food production.

- To become part of the Government discussion about an Australian food policy