

Capital Food and Fibre Strategy

Discussion Paper
November 2021



Acknowledgment to Country

Yuma
Dhawura nguna ngurumbangu gunangu Ngunnawal.
Nginggada dindi dhawura Ngunnawalbun
yindjumaralidjinyin.
Mura bidji mulanggaridjindjula.
Naraganawaliyiri yarabindjula.

Hello

This country is Ngunnawal (ancestral/spiritual)
homeland.

We all always respect elders, male and female,
as well as Ngunnawal country itself.

They always keep the pathways of their ancestors alive.
They walk together as one.

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as Canberra's first inhabitants and Traditional Custodians. We recognise the special relationship and connection that Ngunnawal peoples have with this Country. Prior to the dislocation of Ngunnawal people from their land, they were a thriving people whose life and culture was connected unequivocally to this land in a way that only they understand and know, and is core to their physical and spiritual being. The disconnection of the Ngunnawal people from Culture and Country has had long-lasting, profound and ongoing health and well-being effects on their life, cultural practices, families and continuation of their law/lore. The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate acknowledges the historic dispossession of the Ngunnawal people of Canberra and their surrounding regions. We recognise the significant contribution the Ngunnawal people have played in caring for Country as for time immemorial they have maintained a tangible and intangible cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to these lands and waters.

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A message from the Minister

As ACT Minister for Environment with responsibility for agricultural policy, including urban agriculture, it is a pleasure to be able to welcome you to this first opportunity to help design the ACT's new Capital Food and Fibre Strategy.

This landmark strategy will provide a roadmap for a sustainable, resilient, innovative and secure agricultural system for the ACT and Region. You are our farmers, land managers, business owners, backyard gardeners, marketplaces, community groups, and supporters of food and fibre grown locally in our region. Your knowledge, experience and skills will be central to developing the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy.

Why a new strategy? In a world grappling with climate change—how to stop it and adapt to change already locked in—we need a new approach to how and where we produce food, including in the ACT. We need to transition to sustainable systems that are resilient and help protect and restore our soils and waterways and biodiversity. And we need to make sure we build local food systems that strengthen access for everyone to fresh, healthy and affordable food, provide economic opportunity including job creation, and support strong community participation and inclusion.

I want to ensure that Canberrans have more understanding about the food they eat so they can be confident it is healthy, sustainable and ethically produced, right here in the ACT and Region, as much as possible. I want our First Nations people, local producers, food businesses, community gardeners and those aspiring to be part of our food future to see themselves in the strategy we produce.

Our discussion paper aims to start a conversation with the broader Canberra community of what we want tomorrow to look like, through the opportunity to create a shared vision for the future of food and fibre in our region.

And our work doesn't stop at development of the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy. The Strategy will be followed by a detailed implementation plan with specific actions, goals and monitoring and evaluation processes to realise our shared goals.

But most importantly, what do you think? We want the Strategy to be co-designed, through mutual learning and strategic collaboration. It is an opportunity to work together on building an exciting future for our region.

Let's work together to create a Capital Food and Fibre Strategy that sets a clear vision for the ACT. It will guide the development and evolution of sustainable and resilient food and fibre production systems. Your knowledge and experience will be a vital contribution to our collective understanding of how to ensure we achieve food security that is ethical, sustainable, resilient, innovative, and accessible to all.

Rebecca Vassarotti

Minister for the Environment

November 2021

Our context

In many ways our current agricultural sector reflects our history. Starting with the forced displacement of First Nations people and then the reclaiming of farmland from colonial settlers to build the nation's new capital, food production and agriculture has traditionally taken a back seat in the ACT. As a result, farming and market gardening is smaller and less diverse compared to other Australian city regions such as Sydney and Melbourne. Covering about 15% of the Territory, food and fibre grown in the ACT is still dominated by traditional farming of beef, lamb and wool.

Over time there has been diversification into poultry and eggs, vineyards, vegetables and small orchards and gourmet products such as truffles. A thriving local farmers market scene has grown with the diversification and increased interest in regional and local produce, and there is an increasing number of urban agricultural enterprises and community gardens across Canberra. However, the ACT is still reliant on food produced elsewhere. An estimated 90% of our leafy greens and fruits alone come from the Sydney region.

Our population has also changed. Contemporary Canberra has a far more diverse population, who have brought a wealth of different food cultures and knowledge to our region; and, as part of our journey to

reconciliation, the ACT Government is taking conscious steps to work with respect and in partnership with the region's First Nations people.

Above all, our climate has changed posing new risks to the wellbeing and prosperity of our community and the ecological health of our landscapes.

As the ACT works to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and to prepare our community for climate change impacts, the need to consider our food system has become apparent. Around the world, cities and the regions they both service and rely on are recognising they cannot reach their goals of being prosperous and resilient in the face of a changing climate without addressing where and how their food is produced.

The regional context is also important for the ACT. The NSW local government areas surrounding the ACT are important to us, both as historically strong agricultural regions, and as populations who work in our city and rely on it as a transport hub and for other key services. As we reimagine our food systems through the new Capital Food and Fibre Strategy, looking to work with our neighbouring regions to mutually strengthen our agricultural systems, economies and community will benefit us all.

You can read more about our local and regional context, and some of the issues already explored in more detail in the report *Food in the ACT*.¹



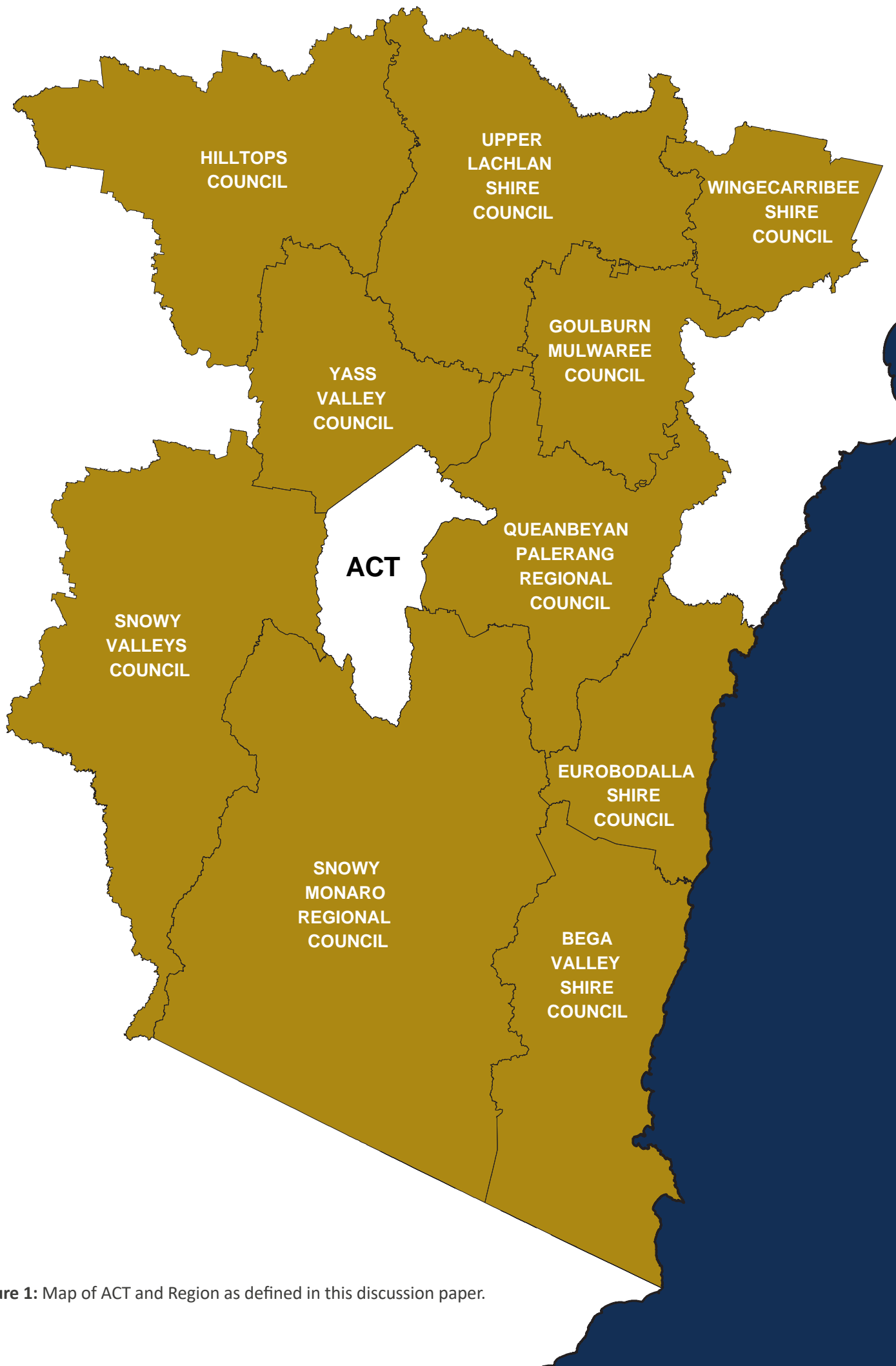
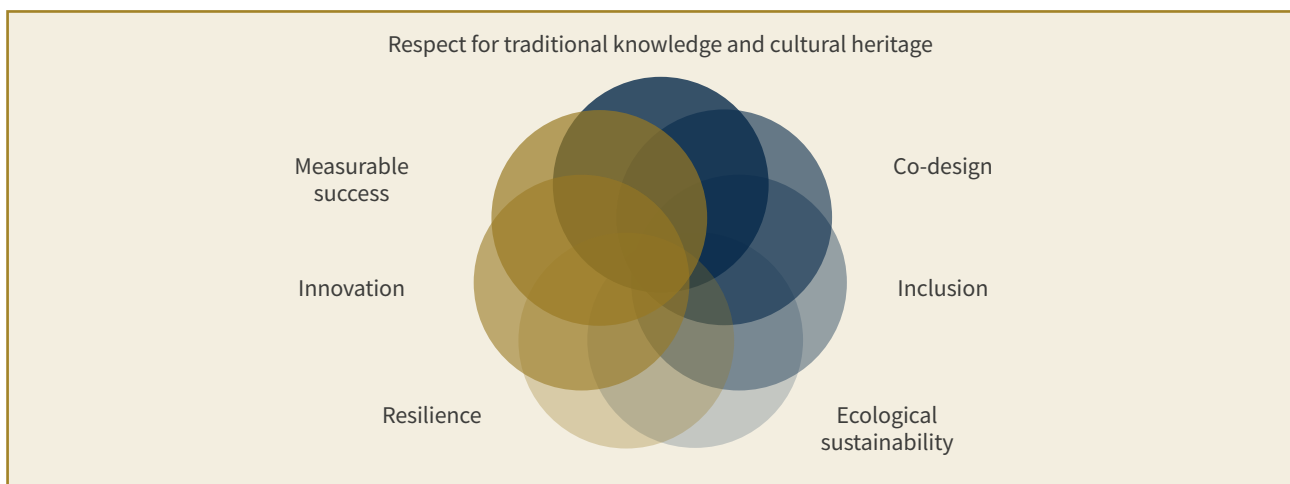


Figure 1: Map of ACT and Region as defined in this discussion paper.

Principles guiding the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy

Taking into account our context and our ambition, the following principles will guide the goals and actions to be included in the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy (the Strategy) and what the goals and actions should prioritise. These principles draw on the ACT's Wellbeing Framework.²

Figure 2: Capital Food and Fibre Strategy guiding principles.



1. Respect for traditional knowledge and cultural heritage: The Strategy will recognise Traditional Custodians' knowledge of land management and use of native plants and animals in our region in determining the best way forward for food and fibre production.

2. Co-design: We will work collaboratively with those already involved in the food and fibre sector and the broader community in the ACT and Region to prepare this Strategy.

3. Inclusion: Development of the Strategy will seek to include people from all ethnicities, age-ranges, abilities and cultures living in urban and rural areas, those from businesses and those representing their communities or organisations, professionals, volunteers and hobbyist alike.

4. Ecological sustainability: The Strategy will explicitly identify and foster farming practices at all scales that maintain, restore and protect the health of our soils, water and biodiversity, and embed and reward environmental stewardship.

5. Resilience to climate change and drought: The Strategy will factor in the impacts of climate change and droughts of increased length and intensity. It will identify necessary steps to both ensure the ACT region's approach to food and fibre is resilient, and particularly that food and fibre producers and manufacturers are supported to adapt and thrive.

6. Innovation: From creating new business models for growing and selling food, to adopting promising technologies to help adapt to a changing climate, the Strategy will identify and promote ways that farmers and food manufacturers can take advantage of the strong research and development capability of the ACT.

7. Measurable success: To ensure the Strategy is more than an aspirational document, it will include steps to strengthen our data and evidence base so we can identify practical ways to measure our progress towards its goals.

Statement of ambition

We want Canberra to learn from cities such as Seattle, New York, Toronto, Singapore, Barcelona and Melbourne, which are building local food systems as part of the solution to reducing further climate change, and as important protection against its impacts. Like them, we want to invest in urban and regional agriculture and building a thriving local food economy as part of ensuring the ACT is resilient, prosperous and climate-ready.

We believe the ACT has many strengths and opportunities to build on. We have good soil and water resources and a small rural farming sector with a strong shared practice of environmental stewardship. We have world class food and fibre research and innovation through the CSIRO and our universities and new agritech businesses.

There is a growing and enthusiastic number of urban agriculture enterprises and strong interest in community gardens and other local food initiatives. We have strong connections to our neighbouring local government areas in NSW, which both rely on Canberra for economic opportunity and have a strong interest in securing the future of their farmers and other food and fibre enterprises. And critically, we have the opportunity to recognise and embed First Nations peoples' knowledge and skill in land management and food production into our new strategy so we create a new approach to food and fibre based on cultural respect and partnership.

With your help, we want to write the Strategy as a roadmap that identifies **how the ACT and Region can achieve a flourishing, sustainable and resilient food and fibre sector.**

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

Proposed vision and goals

To realise our ambition, the Strategy will be a roadmap to delivering social, environmental and economic benefits based on secure, climate-resilient food and fibre production across in the ACT; and respond to the need to mitigate climate challenges via adaptation and diversification.

It will explore pathways to increased local food security and build collaborative networks of those involved in different aspects of agriculture production, research and innovation.

To get this right, it needs a clear shared vision and goals shared by the food and fibre sector, government and the broader community.

Some statements we think could be part of a vision for the Strategy

- » The ACT and Region's food and fibre production systems are innovative, sustainable, diverse and resilient in a changing climate.
- » Farming systems improve biodiversity conservation and maintain ecological health.
- » The ACT and Region's community has improved access to local, healthy food produced by regional farmers, community groups or individuals and its members are more engaged and included in food and fibre production.
- » ACT food and fibre farming and manufacturing enterprises are thriving, provide increased employment for the region, and are strongly supported by Canberrans.

Getting our goals right

Any good strategy needs to identify goals that are necessary to meet to achieve the overall vision. Some proposed goals are:

- 1. Transition to ecologically sustainable food and fibre production supported by strong environmental stewardship to ensure our region has healthy soils, water and air.**
- 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.**
- 3. Increase the capacity to produce food and fibre locally to shorten supply chains and reduce reliance on external supply.**
- 4. Support innovation in the food and fibre sector through the adoption of diverse practices, business models and new technology.**
- 5. Enhance participation, knowledge exchange, employment opportunities and financial viability across the food and fibre supply chain.**



We want to hear from you:

What is your vision for the future of food production in the ACT? How would you express it? What are the key elements of success we should capture in the vision?

Thinking of your preferred vision for food and fibre in the ACT and Region, are these the right goals?

Are there other key goals that the Strategy should include and why?

What would success for each goal look like? How can the barriers for achieving these goals be addressed?

Towards goal one: Transition to ecologically sustainable food and fibre production supported by strong environmental stewardship to ensure our region has healthy soils, water and air.



Incorporating old and new perspectives to manage our land for ecological health

Land clearing for agriculture practices has had a fundamental impact on Australia's landscapes and ecology. While these practices enabled Australia becoming one of the most food secure nations in the world and keep regional communities viable, in many cases they have caused environmental degradation. Recently there has been increasing interest in adopting more environmentally friendly practices, including land management practices of Australia's First Nations people. We now have an opportunity to reincorporate First Nations knowledge to restore, maintain and protect ecological health as an integral part of land management, knowing that our own health and that of all native species depends on it.

Farmers play an important part of ACT society through their responsibilities as land managers for the Territory. Environmental management and other conservation activities are regularly undertaken by ACT farmers. Often, they work together through Landcare and Catchment Management groups to coordinate activities such as tree planting.

All land in the ACT is held through leases. The ACT is unique as Land Management Agreements (LMAs) establish sustainable agricultural management practices and good farm biodiversity while maintaining the ecological and cultural values of the land and protecting the environment from harm. The ACT Government delivers a suite of programs and helps farmers, community groups and individuals to care for the environment including:

- » bushfire mitigation, to protect the community, infrastructure and environmental assets
- » soil erosion prevention, which contributes to improved water quality
- » environmental plantings, to enhance biodiversity and habitat and encourage pollinators
- » control of invasive species

Many of these activities now benefit from incorporating traditional practices and knowledge, resulting in more effective fire and invasive species management as just two examples.

Environmental awareness is creating new land stewardship opportunities

Recognising how integral the maintenance of healthy landscapes is can also yield new sources of income for farmers, through the recognition and adoption of environmental stewardship as a core function. In many ways the idea of environmental stewardship mirrors our new understanding and appreciation of the role traditional owners have played for thousands of years through caring for country. As farming systems and practices continue to evolve, the roles and responsibilities for all landowners and managers to maintain ecological health to benefit us all will become increasingly important.

Environmental stewardship initiatives can supplement traditional farm income and may be an emerging opportunity. For example, the Australian Government provides support for biodiversity stewardship on farms, initially through a pilot to create income from plantings that deliver biodiversity and carbon abatement.³ This is in addition to the Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI, now part of the Emissions Reduction Fund) that allowed land managers to earn carbon credits by changing land use or management practices to store carbon or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The recognition of the need for environmental stewardship has also seen increased opportunities for Indigenous Australians to be paid to bring their knowledge to other land managers.

Environmental stewardship in urban areas is also happening. One example is Gardens for Wildlife Victoria, which helps residents to develop and implement gardening programs that improve wildlife habitat on private land and supplement government-led habitat protection on public lands.⁴ Closer to home, the ACT's ParkCare volunteers and LandCare groups look after native plants and habitats across the Territory. For individual households, the Climate Wise Garden Designs booklet provides advice on how to design gardens that suit climate and promote healthy ecosystems.

More demand for environmentally friendly production practices

The drivers towards environmental sustainability create opportunities for exploring new ways for agricultural production. There is increasing interest in procuring food ingredients from sustainable sources or in diversifying to new sources. Producers also try to use less packaging or turn to materials that have a lower environmental impact, are biodegradable or recycled.

New environmentally conscious production practices are emerging. The Australian meat industry has set a carbon neutral target for 2030⁵ and, as a response, carbon neutral food brands are emerging. Regenerative farming practices have the potential to increase environmental health and, at the same time, improve financial and farmer wellbeing.⁶

Mirroring these trends, urban gardening is also changing. There are individuals and community groups that help gardeners to adopt non-chemical methods for controlling weeds or pests and increase soil fertility and health. Urban agriculture can also enhance urban biodiversity and, through increased permeable surfaces and green cover, help to reduce city heat and rainwater run-off.

Food for thought

New production practices may be taken up slowly because of a lack of information about new opportunities, lack of nearby demonstration farms and the absence of vocal champions. There could also be uncertainty about political and policy settings, especially around climate change.

Financial and time investments needed to change farming or gardening practices could be high, leading to reluctance or difficulties for obtaining financing from banks or other lenders. New practices could also be incompatible with current ones.



We want to hear from you:

How can we best support the incorporation of First Nations land management and traditional farming expertise?

How do you think we can best support a thriving urban agriculture sector that is founded on ecological sustainability and community wellbeing?

What is the role of government, producers and the broader community?

What key actions can farmers take to increase the ecological health of our agricultural land? What practices do we need to change, or reconsider? Which ones should we promote?

What are important considerations for urban agriculture to ensure it supports ecological health?

Towards goal two: Build the drought and climate change resilience of the ACT farm sector by identifying and encouraging practices that best fit the region's conditions.



The Capital Food and Fibre Strategy will include a Regional Drought Resilience Plan (the Plan). The Plan will work with the broader community to identify and guide actions to building the ACT's resilience to future drought, focusing on agriculture and related industries.

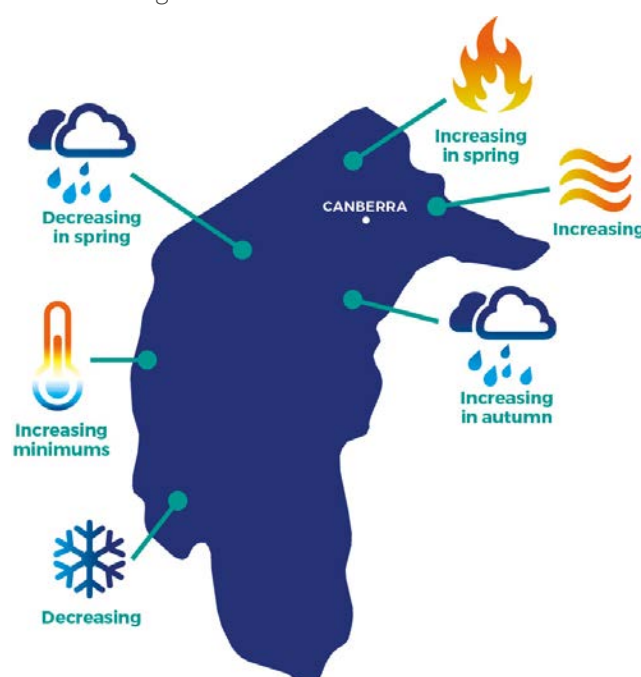
The Plan will collaborate with farmers and related industries to focus on innovative ways to build the drought resilience into the agricultural systems.

The Plan is funded in partnership with the Australian Government through the Future Drought Fund's Regional Drought Resilience Planning program.

The climate is changing

The ACT is projected to warm to about 0.7°C between 2020 and 2039 and about 2°C between 2060 and 2079.⁷ Coupled with projected increases in frequency, duration and intensity of drought, this means we need to be well prepared to manage the impacts of drought and climate change on our region.

Figure 3: Map of projected changes associated with climate change.



Farming and associated sectors need to prepare for future droughts

Droughts are a part of the Australian landscape. But under climate change they will get longer, more intense and more frequent. So, the ACT needs to be prepared, adaptive and resilient in the face of future drought.

The ACT has faced significant drought conditions in recent history, most recently during the 2017–2019 drought and the Millennium drought in the early 2000s. These have social, economic and environmental impacts.

We want rural landholders and supporting industries to tell us what support and initiatives they would like from the ACT Government to increase the Territory's resilience to drought.

What do we mean by resilience?

'Resilience is the ability to cope with and thrive in the face of change'⁸

A resilient farmer is one who can prepare for, maintain viability through, and recover from prolonged period of drought or other stochastic events.

The Plan will identify ways to increase the health and wellbeing of communities affected by drought. When our farmers are resilient and have the tools and knowledge to enable them to continue producing during times of drought, their communities can be sustained long term as well.

Drought preparedness actions are happening across Australia

Farmers, communities, governments, businesses and not-for-profit sectors all have a shared responsibility to build Australia's drought preparedness. Many activities are already happening, but more action is required.

CSIRO has identified drought resilience as one of its missions. Researchers are working on a range of projects to improve environmental, regional and agricultural resilience to drought, such as breeding crops better adapted to Australian conditions⁹, developing precision agriculture techniques¹⁰ and improving water management¹¹.

Some regions near Canberra have already formulated their own plans, such as the Goulburn Murray

Resilience Strategy.¹² It is looking to increase resilience by, for example, promoting:

- » Indigenous crop production to increase the diversity and flexibility in agriculture
- » smart farming to promote change and diversification of farm businesses to adapt to shocks
- » renewed rural skills connect to connect transformational farmers with those struggling to cope with changes.

The ACT Government has been delivering programs to increase drought resilience. Farmers have been able to apply for grants funding to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. In Addition, the Farm Business Resilience Program, jointly funded through Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the ACT Government, provides training and coaching to build farm resilience, risk management and farm mentoring.

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning program will complement this existing work by focusing on future actions.

Building drought resilience

Drought resilience isn't just about water. Drought has associated social, economic, environmental and wellbeing impacts. We need to build economic, environmental and social resilience to drought for our rural landholders and associated industries.

This is an opportunity for the sector and supporting industries to tell us how this should be done in the ACT and region.



We want to hear from you:

What are your top concerns for future droughts?

What direct or indirect actions that can build drought resiliency can be taken that suit our region?

What are the costs/benefits of those actions? Are there barriers preventing them to be taken up right now?

How could the ACT Government support you to build resilience?

What opportunities are there for carbon sequestration and net zero emissions farming and innovation that also increase drought resiliency?

Towards goal three: Increase the capacity to produce food and fibre locally to shorten supply chains and reduce reliance on external supply.



The ACT is reliant on food produced elsewhere. It is estimated that 90% of our leafy greens and fruit alone come from the Sydney region. People buy most of their food from supermarkets, sourcing low levels of locally grown food. Changing this situation needs concerted efforts by producers and consumers alike.

It's already happening! ACT has urban and rural food and fibre supply chains

We have urban food production, value adding (such as using milk from the region to make cheese) and other activities within the ACT. There are backyard gardens, a growing number of community gardens and urban farms with vegetable, seedling and egg production, to name a few.

We also have enterprises along the food supply chain. This includes farmers markets and direct sale businesses like those offering fresh food and produce boxes. There are bakeries, breweries and wineries that

use local produce as well as restaurants with 'paddock to plate' ethos.

New and innovative industries are developing, such as truffle and olive production. Alpaca wool is becoming one of the world's most valuable and sought-after fibres, and the ACT has one of the largest alpaca districts in Australia at its doorstep in southern NSW. Hemp fibre is an emerging opportunity and varieties can also be grown for food. Traditional fibres have been used by Aboriginal people. For example, native flax lily, wild flax and *Lomandra* species are used to weave baskets.

Food and fibre production is responding to emerging markets and policy drivers

Agriculture production is changing across the globe, including in and around the ACT. Changing community attitudes to food are one of the main factors driving these changes.

There is a growing demand for local food and food produced with environmentally conscious practices. Although Australia is one of the most food secure countries, COVID-19 demonstrated the fragility of supply chains. The demand for native Australian food continues to grow. There is an opportunity to increase the Aboriginal participation in the bush food sector.¹³

In fibre industries, similar drivers of sustainability and locality have emerged. Intensive research and development efforts have led to changes in the wool industry. There are product innovations like merino wool denim and wool fur available to consumers. There are also emerging products like wool-based packaging materials that can be used for food transport, amongst other purposes.

Agricultural production, processing and consumption are impacted by policies at all levels of government, particularly as food security, water security and energy security are interlinked. In Australia, some examples are policies regulating land and water use, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity conservation, biosecurity, agricultural chemicals and food safety.

Food for thought

Food and fibre production within the ACT has been limited by the number of people who undertake farming activities. This includes people using urban land such as backyards, community gardens and city farms. We need to encourage broader participation and help ensure new enterprises are financially viable and sustainable. Supporting new agriculture-based businesses can generate valuable employment and economic diversification for the ACT.

Currently, agricultural land occupies about 15% of the ACT. As Canberra's population grows, this area could be reduced due to urban growth, and we also need to pay attention to the more fertile soils found in our suburbs. As a result, the urban contribution to primary production will be increasingly important as it can be highly productive.¹⁴ Water is a limiting factor. We need to increase water efficiency in cultivation and improve rainwater capture, particularly in urban areas.

Canberra's relatively short growing season limits the variety of conventional crops and demands consideration of native and new foods and varieties, and new ways of growing. Commercial outdoor market gardens have greater establishment costs for polytunnels or hot houses for year-round cultivation of vegetables.¹⁵ Similar issues arise for orchardists in preventing frost damage to trees. These challenges can be overcome by indoor growing, but we need to think about energy efficiency. There are ways to heat greenhouses using solar energy, thermal mass and even compost.¹⁶



We want to hear from you:

What needs to happen to allow the ACT and Region's food and fibre industries continue to grow?

What do you think should be the role of government to promote more local food and fibre production and manufacture?

What are the opportunities for agri-tourism in the ACT?

Should we foster commercial opportunities for community-based enterprises to help increase access and success for new businesses?

Towards goal four: Support innovation in the food and fibre sector through the adoption of diverse practices, business models and new technology



Innovation has always been an integral part of agriculture

The ACT and Region has been an innovator in agricultural practices and moving forward, incorporating traditional and new knowledge, technology and approaches will be even more important.

Agricultural industries are already developing and implementing practices that are better matched to Australian soils and climate. These include conservation and precision agriculture, which aim to minimise soil disturbance and use information on paddock properties to determine most efficient management practices, respectively.

Agri-tech is a rapidly growing opportunity in rural and urban areas

Technologies and practices in rural agriculture, as well as emerging urban agriculture, are constantly developing as responses to greater community desire for sustainable and local food.

Agri-tech is the use of technology and technological innovation to improve agriculture. Some Agri-tech opportunities include:

- » agrivoltaics, the growing of crops or farm animals under renewable energy infrastructure such as solar panels
- » space saving urban agriculture applications such as vertical farms and modular stackable urban farms

- » other city-based solutions such as self-watering urban/indoor gardens, standing hydroponic gardens, rooftop farming kits and so on.
- » new disciplines like aquaculture or aquaponics in urban settings¹⁷

Combining traditional knowledge and technological innovation is also yielding new possibilities, helping to monitor, scale up and sustainably manage wild harvesting of native plants, for example.

Opportunities also exist along the supply chain. There are Australian-made, environmentally friendly production enablers like biological-based fungicides and livestock supplements that reduce methane emissions, and emerging plant-based products that provide alternatives to meat.

Diversification of farming enterprises can also create stronger business models. For example, incorporating agri-tourism such as ‘pick your own’ and highlighting the region’s farming are already being explored by local businesses.

Examples of emerging, service oriented Agritech are artificial intelligence (AI) enabled drones for irrigation, herbicides, pollination and seed planting; networked devices and sensors for livestock monitoring and management as well as real time access to soil moisture readings and irrigation control.

The ACT and Region is well positioned to embrace such agriculture innovations, from city backyards to large rural farms. We have top research and development institutions including CSIRO, ANU, University of Canberra and the Centre for Entrepreneurial Agri-technology in our city.

Food for thought

There are factors that limit or slow down the adoption of Agritech innovations. Growers may not be aware that innovations exist, or there may be few local demonstration farms or trial sites to visit.

Establishment and maintenance costs for new infrastructure and equipment are often high, particularly the intensive, enclosed urban farming systems can have expensive energy demands.

Availability of land that is suitable for agriculture or urban farming may be low as land use or rental agreements may limit activities.



We want to hear from you:

How do we encourage the adoption of new technologies and innovations, particularly those that diversify agricultural production and ensure it is sustainable across the landscape?

Towards goal five: Enhance participation, knowledge exchange and employment opportunities across the food and fibre supply chain



There is growing interest in local food production in the ACT and Region

Nearly 400 people are employed in the ACT in broadscale agriculture; that is 0.2% of people that are employed in the ACT. The gross value of agricultural production in the ACT was \$34 million in 2019, growing from \$21 million in 1990. It contributed 0.08% to the ACT's overall gross state product.

It is difficult to estimate the number and productivity of Canberra's private, school and community gardens. Preliminary analysis done by the ACT Government suggested that community gardens cover more than 60,000m² land within the ACT. The ACT Region Community Gardens and School Gardens map¹⁸, which has been produced by the University of

Canberra, lists almost 100 gardens. The Canberra Organic Growers Society (COGS) operates 12 community gardens in the ACT.

High interest in joining the community gardens and grassroots support for the establishment of urban farms within Canberra demonstrate our residents' interest in food production in urban settings. The popularity of farmers markets shows a demand for local product.

The ACT has a diverse multi-cultural community; there is unharnessed potential amongst the community's cultures for diversification of food products that also facilitate connections across the community between cultural groups, age classes and vulnerable or marginalised societal groups. This applies equally

strongly to native foods. To date there has been little attention to paid to consciously fostering the development of local native food enterprises in the ACT, another untapped opportunity.

Taken together, the ACT has the potential for significantly increase participation across its population and supply chains.

Food for thought

The ACT is a relatively small marketplace and may not be able to support a significantly higher number of commercial operations without conscious decisions by institutions and businesses to procure more local food.

We need to ensure production of healthy, affordable food that is accessible for everyone, and is not just high-end niche products. It would be easier for busy people to buy local produce from suburban shops in addition to markets. Clear branding of locally produced food and fibre would make purchase decisions easier.

Innovative ways are called for to encourage people to join the food production movement. We need to combat social isolation in the digital age, cultural and language barriers affecting people born overseas and second-generation migrants, and physical and social barriers to the inclusion of other-abled people.



We want to hear from you:

How do we enable younger generations and people from diverse cultural backgrounds to gain the skills and experience to generate new agricultural enterprises in the ACT?

How can we encourage cross-cultural knowledge exchange and connection through local food?

In what ways if any can urban agriculture contribute to community wellbeing?



Endnotes

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