

NSW Sustainable Food System

How we feed ourselves is at the core of who we are and what kind of world we want to create. Food shapes the environment, our health, and our social lives. The Greens will create a sustainable food system.

Flooding across NSW recently showed us just how much climate change threatens our food supply. Food prices have skyrocketed and will continue to rise as extreme weather events like drought and flooding become more frequent and impact our farmland and supply chains.

The Greens will establish a NSW Food Systems Council that will develop a statewide sustainable food strategy. The strategy will include ensuring our farmland is resilient to climate change, building a circular food economy and urban agriculture industry, embracing new agrotechnology, regulating supermarkets to limit food waste and empowering future generations by bringing food production education into our schools.

THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Establish a NSW Food Systems Council that will develop a statewide sustainable food strategy
- ▲ Support the build of a \$300 million NSW Regenerative Agriculture Centre, providing free training and funding for farmers to shift to regenerative and climate-resilient practices
- ▲ Facilitate the creation of a \$500 million Urban Agriculture Fund, creating a circular food economy through community-led initiatives, supporting First Nations 'bush food' industry, creating thousands of new jobs
- ▲ Regulate major supermarkets, ending large-scale food waste and aesthetic standards for farmers, and implementing 'food miles' labelling
- ▲ Establish Mindful and Sustainable Living as a core subject in NSW schools, teaching permaculture, cooking, science and health through edible gardening

NSW Food Systems Council

The Greens will establish a NSW Food Systems Council that will include First Nations representatives, land holders, Land Care representatives, planning experts, Natural Resources Access Regulator, Natural Resources Commission and Local Government NSW and other key industry stakeholders. It is key that the Council represents a cross section of the food and

agricultural industries and works with local communities to develop tailored solutions and a transition to a more resilient future.

The Council will be resourced to develop a statewide sustainable food strategy, design and carry out the creation of a Sustainable Food Centre, set up and administer the Urban Agriculture Fund, introduce new supermarket regulations and coordinate the plan for sustainable education. The Council will ensure these initiatives are rolled out strategically in communities and across the state.

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE FOR TRADITIONAL FARMS

Since WWII, industrial farming practices like monoculture and chemical inputs have depleted soil nutrients, polluted our water and contributed to the extinction and climate crises. These practices, combined with extreme weather events and a worldwide shortage of fertiliser, mean traditional farming is struggling to keep up with food demands in NSW.

Regenerative practices reverse the impact of industrial farming and make farmland climate-resilient. The Greens will work with local and international regenerative agriculture pioneers, alongside First Nations people, to establish a \$300 million NSW Regenerative Agriculture Centre.

The NSW Regenerative Agriculture Centre will:

- Provide free training and grants for farmers to implement practices like no-till, using cover crops, polyculture, reducing chemical inputs, livestock-crop mix, and using methane-reducing feed for livestock
- Assist farmers in accessing the Emissions Reduction Fund
- Guide farmers to obtain Organic Certification
- Recognise traditional Aboriginal agriculture as a vital source of knowledge

Moving towards regenerative agriculture will align NSW with international standards, as Australia currently uses twelve agricultural chemical inputs banned by the European Union based on their harm to human health and the environment.

Not only do these practices make our farmland more resilient to extreme weather events, but they also reduce climate change itself. Regenerative agriculture is now recognised as one of the best ways to achieve carbon drawdown and return us to a stable climate.

URBAN AGRICULTURE: THE CIRCULAR FOOD ECONOMY

While regenerative agriculture is essential to mitigate climate change, there is a global movement to recognise urban agriculture's social and environmental benefits. The COVID -19 crisis and climate-induced floods and fires demonstrate how vulnerable the traditional farming system is to disruptions. Growing food in urban areas reduces transport emissions, increases food security, and promotes community connection and healthy eating habits to tackle our health crisis.

The Greens will create a \$500 million Urban Agriculture Fund to build robust local food systems and a circular food economy to end food waste and ensure affordable and healthy food. This funding is modelled on countries like the Netherlands and Singapore, which have successfully invested in urban agriculture.

Through the Urban Agriculture Fund, Councils will facilitate the following projects:

Community Gardens, Education Hubs and Food Banks

Studies of Australians' responses to the COVID -19 pandemic showed that edible gardening improves physical and mental well-being, fosters healthy eating habits, creates community connection, and increases food security. Councils will:

- Employ Food Officers to map areas where volunteer community gardens can expand onto vacant lots and unused Crownland, and provide rate relief to landholders who offer their land up for community garden use
- Provide financial grants for independent urban farm start-ups
- Establish state-funded community gardens that act as education hubs for permaculture and provide space to support the First Nations 'bush food' industry
- Build public Food Banks to provide rescued food to those in need
- Promote local farmer's markets with no stallholder fees

Household Edible Gardens

Planning laws can mean landholders who want to grow food are prohibited. The Greens will legislate a 'Right to Farm' if a landholder can show no pollution risk to their food or damage to surrounding areas. Councils will subsidise gardening materials for individuals who intend to grow food at home and provide free soil assessment to advise planting and caring for fruit and nut trees.

Vertical Farms and New Agrotechnology

Often called "farms of the future", vertical farms are buildings where crops are grown inside using soilless farming techniques like hydroponics, aeroponics, and aquaponics, in vertically stacked layers.

Farming indoors protects food from adverse weather conditions like flooding, removes the need for pest control chemicals, can use up to 95 percent less water, and produce up to four hundred times more food per hectare than traditional farming. It also uses less fertiliser than traditional farming, which is beneficial given the shortage of fertiliser worldwide.

Electricity use is the only contentious issue around these new technologies. However, renewable energy can remedy this. Western Australia recently announced Australia's first solar-powered vertical farm, and NSW should follow! The Greens will invest in publicly owned vertical farms in urban areas to bring food production closer to our plates and move food production closer to net zero emissions.

Urban Orchards

Public fruit and nut trees cool down urban areas, improve air quality by reducing motor vehicle pollution, provide free food for the public and create a space for community engagement. Urban orchards will be established in community parks and along nature strips. Fruit-picking equipment will be available in public spaces for people to pick their own food. Agriculture workers will harvest produce if it is not picked by the public and transport it to Food Banks.

Food Waste and a Circular Food Network

Food waste costs the Australian economy \$36.6 billion annually, and rotting food sent to landfill also produces methane, contributing to climate heating. In NSW, 1.7 million tonnes of food is wasted each year. The Greens will establish a large-scale composting program to turn food scraps into compost and fertiliser to distribute to urban, peri-urban agriculture projects or regional farms in a circular food network. The composting program will be mandatory for residents and businesses who will be provided with a new composting bin.

Enrichment programs for live-in and care facilities

Edible gardens will be established in nursing homes, hospitals, rehabilitation centres and prisons. Gardening improves age-related diseases like dementia for the elderly and reduces violence and incidents of self-harm among prison inmates. Organic food produced by edible gardening also improves the diet of inmates and nursing home residents.

REGULATING MAJOR SUPERMARKETS

For most people in NSW, food comes from supermarkets like Coles and Woolworths. The Greens will pass laws to ensure corporate giants promote healthy eating habits and sustainable food purchases and treat farmers fairly. The Greens will require supermarkets:

- End aesthetic standards on fruit and vegetables
- Prioritise sourcing locally grown food
- Display locally grown food in high-purchase areas in the supermarket
- Donate edible food to Food Banks instead of sending it to landfill and if there is no Food Bank in the area, give away the food for free in the supermarket itself
- Display a 'Food Miles Label' on food grown locally to inform customers of the history of their food

MINDFUL AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

Children in NSW spend most of their waking hours at school, and what they learn shapes their whole life. But we are failing them. One in four children and adolescents aged 2 - 17 are overweight or obese. They are also experiencing more mental health problems than previous generations. Our schools have a responsibility to tackle this crisis.

Children who feel connected with nature are happier and are more likely to make friends, help, and share. Our schools provide little contact with the natural world. Many of them have no trees at all or have poorly managed green spaces.

The Greens will work with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to establish Mindful and Sustainable Living as a mandatory subject from Kindergarten to Year 10 that will combine permaculture, cooking, science, and health. Every school will have an edible garden. Students will plant and manage gardens and fruit and nut trees in the schoolyard and the food grown will be cooked by the students for everyone to enjoy.

Students will learn how the food cycle works and why we need circular networks. They will be connected to nature to boost their mental health and as they prepare the food they have grown, they will learn about a healthy diet and how nutrition affects physical and mental health. Students will also study biology and chemistry by observing and monitoring changes in the garden.

We must empower our children with the skills they need to live a healthy and happy life. And this starts with what they eat and having the skills to feed themselves.