



Submission to the National Food

September 2012.

SecondBite is a not-for-profit organisation committed to making a positive difference to people by identifying sources of nutritious surplus fresh food and produce that might otherwise go to waste and facilitating its safe and timely distribution to agencies and people in need. Last year, with the generous support of 510 volunteers, enough food to provide almost 2 million hearty meals was provided to 307 community food programs across Australia. SecondBite Community Connect™ continues to grow and in 2012, we have a foot-print in every state/territory across Australia and expect to rescue over 2 ½ million kilograms of fresh food (1).

The Australian Government has shown continued leadership on the issue of food security and sustainability. We welcome Australia's first National Food Plan and see it as a wonderful opportunity to support sustainable, strong and healthy food systems for current and future generations of Australians. By working with government, industry and community, SecondBite believes that an innovative and fair National Food Plan that further improves Australia's paddock-to-plate practices will be possible.

The Green Paper asserts the food supply is secure, sustainable and economically viable. It focuses on greater production capacities in Australia, export markets and industry. We acknowledge that food production is vital to our economy and ensures job-security and prosperity. The Green Paper does not acknowledge, however, the evidence regarding the devastating environmental and health impact of the current system (2-6). Nor does it act on the significant political and community support for action on climate change, social inclusion and chronic-disease prevention. By not recognizing these issues, the economic viability of the system is at risk.

Two important issues require urgent attention; i) millions of Australians do not consume food that ensures optimal wellbeing and ii) the environmental sustainability of the food supply is under threat.

These are some of the greatest challenges of the 21st century and a significant transformation must urgently occur to address them.

How do we suggest that the National Food Plan can play a leading role?

The National Food Plan should pave the way for Australia's future on these two fundamental issues. To help ensure the Plan's objective of "a sustainable, globally competitive, resilient food supply, supporting access to nutritious and affordable food" is achievable, SecondBite suggests three key messages be included in the National Food Plan;

1. The rescue and redistribution of fresh food is a part of the solution
2. Every Australian deserves a fair go – ensure nutritious food for all
3. A home grown sustainable food system – local, low-waste, affordable and sustainable food systems



SecondBite Key Message 1:

The rescue and redistribution of fresh food is a part of the solution

Every day SecondBite rescues a portion of the millions of tonnes of food that would otherwise be wasted, and re-distributes it to community food programs supporting people living in disadvantaged circumstances. For example, the food rescued since beginning in 2005, equates to:

- More than 16 million serves of fruit and vegetables delivered to vulnerable community members
- Millions of litres in embodied water and energy not being wasted
- Thousands of dollars saved by farmers, producers and retailers on dumping fees
- Hundreds of thousands of dollars saved by community organisations
- The independent social return on investment study conducted on SecondBite revealed for every \$1 invested, \$4.42 in social returns occur

This simple model of food redistribution highlights that fresh surplus food can be an invaluable resource. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is well placed to support this.

Action for the National Food Plan

Commit to low-food-waste Plan by:

1. Supporting large scale fresh food rescue and redistribution
2. Supporting change on cosmetic specifications, food labelling and safety standards to reduce wasteful food practices
3. Increasing support for sustainable on-farm harvesting and waste management
4. Conducting consumer awareness campaigns regarding seasonality, the impact of domestic food waste and the resources required to produce a food product

SecondBite Key Message 2:

Every Australian deserves a fair go

Amongst the most basic of human needs is access to nutritious and safe food. Yet, right here in the “lucky country” there are as many as 2 million Australians using food relief each year. Many of these people receive income support payments, are socially isolated and experience poor health (7-9). This highlights the inadequacy of welfare benefits in enabling average Australians to keep up with the cost of living and the unfair burden of disease impacting low-income communities. It also highlights the significance of community food programs in providing food and support to address the underlying poverty and social isolation that causes hunger and poor-health.

Action for the National Food Plan:

1. Support the review of income benefits so that payments ensure all Australians can eat a nutritious diet based on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
2. Integrate the community food sector in planning an equitable food system so that food rescue organisations can close their doors and every Australian can have a fair go



3. Ensure multiple Departments of Government work in collaboration with community and industry partners in the development and implementation of the National Food Plan to address social and health inequities

The Green Paper acknowledges some of the challenges we face in establishing a future with a sustainable and equitable food system, however, SecondBite strongly believes that more attention must be paid to low-income and vulnerable Australians, as well as the charitable and non-government organisations that support them. How many of these people were consulted in the plans development? If we ignore these significant food/social issues, we risk higher rates of diet-related disease, widening of “the gap” in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people, and consequently, increases in the already huge cost of managing poor health.

SecondBite Key Message 3:
A home-grown sustainable food system

The sentiment in the community, health and academic circles we work across suggests that there is disappointment in the limited evidence that our submissions to the Issues Paper have been included in the Green Paper. SecondBite recognises the existing innovative and inspiring food movements, professional networks and credible think-tanks that operate throughout Australia. These valuable resources offer significant resilience and expertise that are integral to our national food future. For example;

- The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance has commenced the People’s Food Plan (10)
- The Food Alliance, the Council to Homeless Persons, Australian Council of Social Services, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab and Public Health Association of Australia have significant insight on food, health, environment and community
- Food co-operatives, community gardens, farmers markets, cooking programs and sustainable agriculture projects are growing in momentum and reach
- Networks of local-government, farmers, gardeners, businesses, not-for-profit and health are emerging (often called food security networks)

Action for the Food Plan:

1. Learn from the consultations throughout the People’s Food Plan and use it to listen to the Australian community
2. Utilise non-government experts, including health professionals, peak community organisations and academics, to support the Plans’ development and implementation
3. Recognise the importance of local food systems and commit to a target of all Australians being supplied equitable access to regional foods
4. Support all levels of government hosting and participating in food security networks and be informed by and contribute to these vital portals



In closing:

Every day SecondBite witnesses the positive change that can take place within our community through the deliveries of free fresh surplus food. Recently, one of the community food programs that SecondBite supports shared their story:

The Women's Street Soccer team meets every Thursday and we are always pleased to receive a big box of fruit from SecondBite. It has become part of our ritual that we share some fruit at half time. Many of the women at street soccer suffer from mental illness or are homeless or marginalised for one reason or another and street soccer is a fun part of their week and a time for some exercise, fun and socialising. Sharing fruit together is a fantastic part of the program, and it fits in so well with our philosophy of being healthy. For some of the women, this is the only fruit they eat all week. The best thing is that the box of fruit is always there, week in, week out and that constancy makes a huge difference. Plus it tastes great!

- Jill Murphy, The Big Issue

SecondBite works in collaboration with government, advocacy bodies, universities, industry and community groups in order to create sustainable and long-term solutions that address food insecurity. Fresh food rescue and redistribution is an important immediate action that can dramatically repair some disconnect within the current food system. DAFF and the National Food Plan are well placed to embed and support food rescue across Australia. Beyond SecondBite, there is an incredible ground swell of community food systems, sustainable and equitable food practices and expert community bodies that are also helping to ensure food security for vulnerable Australians – we support these initiatives so that we may close our doors.



If the Plan is effective and “ensures a sustainable, globally competitive and resilient food supply that supports access to nutritious and affordable food” then SecondBite’s services will no longer be necessary and it is to this end that we work every day.



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