Making Periurban Farmers On The Fringe Matter

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Abstract: Land use on the periphery of urban centres is of critical importance in the sustainability of healthy cities, food security, and natural resource management. Despite increasing recognition of the importance of local food production, transport costs, climate change, and the availability of water, the future of periurban rural lands and agriculture is often contentious, and if considered at all in planning, it is a ‘remnant’ issue after the overwhelming political imperative of urbanization. Periurban agriculture also provides significant employment and adjacent urban areas provides the labour required for intensive horticulture but which is often lacking in rural areas. Periurban agriculture is, however, generally conducted by people with little political power. The Sydney basin contains the largest number of horticulturalists of any region in Australia, with farmers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (CLDB) producing 90% of Sydney’s perishable vegetables. However, 40% of the current market gardens, including the most important area in Australia for Asian vegetable production, are in areas designated for urbanization.

This paper discusses strategies to “make periurban farmers matter”, including: policy initiatives, such as the cross-sectoral Premier’s Task Force into Market Gardening by People of Non English Speaking Background, and the Education and Training Plan; the use of deliberative planning, used in complex and messy political contexts to engage government, non-government and community organizations; extensive media coverage; and farmers markets. The paper concludes that it is essential to recognize the “public good” of open space and agriculture in the urban and periurban contexts.

1. Introduction
Despite its economic, cultural and social importance periurban farming on the fringe of Sydney has been forgotten in the development of the Metropolitan Strategy which is the blueprint for Sydney’s future growth and urbanization. The farmers discussed in this paper are “on the fringe” in that their farms are on the periphery or edge of Sydney, and they are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB), also described as from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB). They lack political power, access to information and resources, and have not been included in the consultation process for the development of the Metropolitan Strategy. As discussed in more detail later in this paper CLDB farmers comprise 30% of farmers across all sectors in the Sydney basin, but 90% of vegetable growers, producing 90% of Sydney’s perishable vegetables, with 40% of market gardens located in the designated growth areas (Parker, 2006) with no apparent strategies for their relocation. This paper suggests that the marginalisation and lack of political power of CLDB farmers has contributed to the more general and ongoing failure to effectively consider the future of agriculture and local food production in planning for Sydney’s future as a healthy sustainable city and food security.

In contrast to Sydney, the presence and importance of periurban and urban agriculture (UPA) is being increasingly recognized worldwide (FAO, 2002), including Europe and the USA (Mason, 2007; Pothukuchi & Kaufman 2000), in the maintenance of food security, local food production, its social, cultural and aesthetic value, and providing a closer connection to food production for the urban population. Periurban agriculture refers to farm units close to town, which operate intensive semi, or fully commercial farms to grow vegetables and other horticultural products, raise chickens and other livestock, and produce milk and eggs. Urban agriculture (UA) refers to small areas within the city used for growing crops and raising small livestock for sale in neighbourhood markets (FAO, 2002). An important characteristic worldwide is that UPA is often carried out by vulnerable groups with little political power. A particular characteristic of agriculture in the Sydney basin is the significant contribution of CLDB farmers, which may not be the case in Europe and the USA.

The failure of government to effectively address the importance of agriculture in the planning process raises the important questions: Why? And what is the trigger to ensure that policy makers address the food system for Sydney’s future, to ensure a sustainable healthy city, and a local fresh food supply? These questions require urgent attention, given the current drought, and the potential impact of climate change on Sydney’s food supply, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables, and the growing social movement of consumers for local fresh food.

The potential effects of climate change, increasing transport costs, the increasing importance of local food to consumers, means that the survival of periurban farming is not only beneficial to the farmers themselves, but also the economic, social, cultural and environmental diversity and sustainability of Sydney. This paper presents an overview and summary of several selected interventions to demonstrate
the evolution and effectiveness of strategies implemented over 25 years “to make periurban farmers on the fringe matter”. These interventions have been based on wide-ranging research using a multiplicity of methods and entry points, but based in the general principles of participative action research and social justice.

2. A Snapshot of Agriculture in the Sydney Basin and Sydney’s Forgotten Farmers

The agricultural industry in the Sydney basin is the single largest industry in western Sydney, with a farm gate value of over $1 billion pa, including vegetable production of over $250 million pa (40% of the value of vegetable production in NSW), poultry $278 million pa (40% of NSW production), and cut flowers $185 million pa. In the Sydney basin involvement in periurban agriculture has provided an important settlement strategy for successive waves of migrants (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000) with 30% of farmers across all sectors from CLDB. In market gardening 80-90% of growers are from CLDB, 40% in the poultry industry, 50% in turf, and 80% in cut flower production. Intensive agriculture is highly productive and uses relatively little land, with only 7.6% of lots used for intensive plant and animal production, whereas 78% of the lots are classed as rural residential (Sinclair et al, 2004).

The region has the highest number of horticulturalists of any region in Australia, and the largest number and proportion from CLDB. There are over 2,000 market gardens, which supply 90% of Sydney’s perishable vegetables. They are small intensive family farms, employing a minimum of 5,000 people. Each ethnic group tends to specialize in particular crops. Maltese who grow field brassicas, hydroponic lettuce and tomatoes and Italians (cut flowers, field tomatoes), arrived before and after World War II, and now include second and third generation farmers; Arabic speakers, mainly from Lebanon (Lebanese cucumbers and hydroponics tomatoes) arrived since the 1970’s and the civil war in Lebanon, and more recently Iraqis, and Assyrians from Syria; Cambodians (cherry tomatoes, snow peas and snake beans), Vietnamese (melons and herbs) and Lao arrived since the 1980’s many coming as refugees, and more recently through family reunion; Chinese farmers (Chinese Asian leafy vegetables, shallots, English Spinach) include descendants from those who remained after the gold rushes, and more recent arrivals. Many Chinese came from the one area in China, but there are Cantonese and Mandarin speakers, and Chinese from Vietnam, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore. There are also farmers from the former Yugoslavia, Greece, and Holland and most recently Korea, with African refugees now providing casual labour (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000).

Many worked in factories, restaurants, driving taxis, or on other farms to build up enough capital to start farming, or rented land to farm while working, often living in urban areas. They farm for a variety of reasons including “to be their own boss”, the lack of alternative employment opportunities, limited English competence, and to avoid being on “social security” (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000). They have been extremely entrepreneurial, introducing new crops with no government assistance. They work extremely long hours, working on the farm during the day, 7 days a week, packing the vegetables at night, with the men going to the markets at 1-2 am.

Periurban agriculture is of significant social as well as economic value in providing employment. There is a mutually beneficial relationship between farms and adjacent urban areas for the supply of labour. Intensive horticulture has a high labour requirement, which is supplied by ethnic groups with high unemployment levels from adjacent urban areas, whereas labour is often a limiting factor in regional areas, an important limitation in any relocation. For example, CLDB women provide significant labour in the mushroom industry. The most recent group providing labour is African refugees (Parker, 2006).

Historically CLDB farmers have had little contact with mainstream or ethnospecific organizations, and lacked information and access to resources and services. Service providers have often attributed or “blamed” migrants for this, suggesting that they are not interested or do not want to be involved, and that it is difficult to access migrant groups because of cultural attitudes of suspicion attributed to their historical experience of repression and oppression in their countries of origin. Missingham (2003) however, argued that these developed through the immigrant’s experiences and interactions in Australia which has a long history of racism and discrimination against NESB migrants.

Farmers in the Sydney basin experience multiple disadvantage from the intersection of several factors including: the failure to recognize the importance of periurban agriculture, where service provision is dominated by urbanization; the perception that agricultural production is west of the divide, wheat and sheep, and that the farmer is white and male (as noted later in this paper), the relative importance politically of the large agricultural sectors, such as wheat and wool, compared with horticulture; government approaches which favour large agribusiness and highly organized industries, rather than small family farms; the industry is highly fragmented with no political voice to effectively represent its interests; and the cultural and linguistic diversity of many farmers, often associated with poor English literacy, and farmers are time poor working long hours (Parker & Jarecki, 2003a).
These farmers have not only been forgotten in the planning process, but more generally “forgotten”. For example, Symons (2007) in his recent book “One continuous picnic” which is described on the cover as “a magnificent history of a nation as told through its eating”, describes the sacrifice of family farms to agribusiness, but has failed to recognize the survival of periurban small family farms.

Symons describes the historical importance of Chinese market gardens in Australian history, but has assumed that they have disappeared, with the “suburban smothering of near city gardening and orcharding communities” (p292). He writes that in 1977 newspapers announced the “eviction of four of the city’s last six Chinese market gardeners”, and that the Chinese moved into running cafes. Furthermore, he describes how Woolworths shifted ostentatiously into being the “fresh food people”, but even this “appropriation of freshness was a dubious blessing since they tied up market gardeners and orchardists in often disadvantageous contracts, forcing them to get big or get out”. Again, this suggests that small family market gardens have vanished, which is not yet the case. Periurban small farms have survived, and are increasing in number, with a lower average age of farmers than that in the general farming population. Their contribution can be described as a migrant success story, but the key issue is how much longer can these farms survive given the overwhelming pressures of urbanization and increasing dominance of the supermarkets?

3. The Relocation of Farms and the Impact of Urbanization on Farming and Farmers
   The importance of agriculture in the Sydney basin was clearly recognized in the 1950’s with the concept of a greenbelt for Sydney. However, the concept of the greenbelt appeared to falter with the ongoing urbanization of Sydney, and most noticeably with the decision to develop the NW sector with the Rouse Hill Infrastructure Consortium. The land was seen as empty, just a few “cow paddocks” (Forsythe, 1999) when it was highly productive market gardens.
   The Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, released in 2005, has designated growth areas in SW and NW Sydney, but these areas contain over 40% of the market gardens (Parker, 2006) and are the most valuable areas economically in Australia for Asian vegetable production. In addition to vegetable production, the designated growth areas are important in the production of poultry, cut flowers, nurseries etc. Although the Metropolitan Strategy stated that the retention of agriculture in the Sydney basin was important, it appears that it assumes that this is because agriculture can operate outside the designated growth areas, but does not include strategies for the relocation of agriculture from the designated growth areas. Currently there is considerable attention by politicians and the media on housing affordability and, as argued by some, the need for more land release on the urban fringes to increase housing affordability. There are, however, serious barriers and difficulties limiting the relocation of farmers from the existing growth areas, such as the availability and cost of land and access to water, and the application of environmental and planning regulations, as demonstrated below:

   A Chinese farmer asked council officers prior to purchasing some land as to whether he could use it for a market garden. The land had been a market garden previously, was located in a rural area, and was surrounded by market gardens except for an immediate neighbour on one side. The farmer claims that he had been told he could farm, but after his neighbour complained, with racist undertones, the eventual outcome was that he was only permitted to farm on one of his five acres, despite having constructed a dam at considerable expense to control any runoff. The farm is no longer, economically viable, but he has now purchased the land and has a substantial mortgage.

   A Cambodian farmer purchased land zoned as rural in an area surrounded by other farms. He inquired at his local council office about the process required to build packing shed. He was told this was not permitted. We worked with him, having determined that the advice given was following the guidelines, rather than a regulation. After 60 hours developing the application we were then told that a development application was required to farm before the shed application could be considered.

   Much of the intensive agriculture is capital intensive, with the use of greenhouses, and the capital received from the sale of the land for urbanization may not cover the cost of relocation, which both the farm and the home.

   In 2004 most Local Government councils in the periurban fringe had undertaken rural land use studies and some had conducted environmental audits of agricultural premises. However, it is particularly difficult for CLDB farmers to meet the planning requirements, especially when there is little consistency between local government areas. Furthermore, there appeared to be few guidelines and little transparency or consistency in the decision making process in matters such as approval of development applications to build farm buildings, or to farm. In addition, as described in Parker & Jarecki (2003b) for many farmers there is a high personal psychological and social cost in relocation.

4. Myths and Stereotypes, Attitudes and Values
   Historically a key factor in the failure to acknowledge the importance of agriculture in the Sydney basin has been the common stereotype of the Australian farmer as that of a white male producing wheat and
sheep “west of the divide”, rather than a market gardener (man or woman) from a different cultural background on a small area of land close to urban development. The attitudes and values of some professionals and government agencies are demonstrated below, showing that as they did not regard or value market gardeners as legitimate or worthy farmers, they were unimportant, and consequently had no right of access to resources (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000):

“They are small scale growers. Crops are grown for their own communities. They never trust anyone and cannot be trusted. It is not worth spending time on them”.” Most of them are illegal immigrants. They cannot find work in normal working places. That is why they do this type of farming. So we don’t need to spend public money to provide services to them.” Their contribution to national production is not significant, so (we) don’t need to spend money on them.” “(We) are focused on export markets. If we are to make money we should look for export markets. And for that we should have a reliable source of supply and quality produce. Asian growers lack both.” They are a hard working lot but it is very difficult to talk to them. They never trust outsiders. Tell us about their information channels so that we can target these points to deliver information”.

Myths and stereotypes of market gardeners included (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000):

1. **They farm to avoid paying tax, there is an enormous “black economy”**
   - However, the go farming to be their own boss, to avoid language difficulties because of a lack of English, avoid work place discrimination, the lack of alternative employment, because farming is “in our blood”. They have been closely monitored by the Australian Taxation Office for many years, and have often been the only government agency with significant contact with growers.

2. **They have brought bad farming practices with them**
   - However, many come from a rural, but not a farming environment. Some are highly educated from an urban background.

3. **Growers only stay in the industry for the short term**
   - However, there are significant numbers of second-generation farmers from Italian, Maltese, Lebanese and Chinese backgrounds. In addition, there are many families with young children, so that the average age of farmers in the Sydney Basin is lower than that of the general farming population.

4. **They want to sell their land for urbanization, to make money, it’s their superannuation**
   - Some older farmers whose children do not want to farm may want to sell their land. In general, those who want to stay in farming do not want to sell, as it is extremely difficult and expensive to relocate. (Parker & Jarecki, 2003). In addition, many farmers lease land, particularly in the newer immigrant groups, although the older groups often lease as well as own land.

5. **Growers are illiterate in their own language and come from a peasant background**
   - Literacy varies with the ethnic group; some are highly educated but not in English. Illiteracy is particularly important in some of the earlier groups, such as the Maltese. It has been incorrectly assumed that because they have been in Australia for many years that they can read and write English.

6. **In order to access these farming groups we only need to locate the community leaders.**
   - Many of these communities are heterogeneous and highly fragmented, especially those from war-torn countries. Those identified as community leaders by outsiders may not be the community leaders. They are isolated from urban ethnospecific organizations. It is essential to use multiple entry points to access the community.

Some professionals considered that these farmers were a “welfare issue”, “how much do we have do to for the NESB farmers?” rather than recognizing their contribution to the State’s economy. This view fails to recognize that the industry consists of these farmers, they are not a “minority group” requiring special attention, but rather it is the responsibility of government agencies to establish policies and practices that meet the needs of their client base. At the same time, each government agency interviewed regarded itself as being restricted to its particular mandate, when the issues and concerns required an holistic approach, encompassing specific communication strategies, and industry development. We coined the term “Professional illusion” to denote that professionals see the world according to their own attitudes and values, from their own perspective, rather than the reality (Parker& Suriyabanadara, 2000).

The general and most common response to justify the urbanization of farm land is that “farmers want to sell their land- its their superannuation”, and “they make a lot of money”, whereas the reality is more complex (Parker & Jarecki, 2003b).

5. **Interventions: Strategies to Make Periurban Farmers Matter: Research and Advocacy**

This paper, which focuses on CLDB market gardeners, argues that the failure to recognize and effectively address the importance of periurban farmers and agriculture in the Sydney basin has been exacerbated by the lack of political influence of CLDB farmers, and by the attitudes of government agencies to these farmers. As noted previously “fringe” has two implications- the farmers are on the edge or the fringe of Sydney, but also on the fringe of the “mainstream” as demonstrated by limited access to resources and political power.

Interventions have been embedded in the general principles of participative action research and social justice, enabling the voices of those not normally heard to be heard. Participative action research has
cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation. Reason & Bradbury (2000) proposed the following working definition of action research:

Participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view...it seeks to bring together action with reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individuals and their communities... action research is a practice for the systematic development of knowing and knowledge.. It has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice.

The focus was on learning through action, using multidisciplinary, systemic, and holistic, socioecological, and sociotechnical frameworks. Within this broad rubric a range of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used, including ethnographic approaches to understand the culture from the perspective of the participants, including growers, and the bureaucratic culture of organizations and their effect on the development and implementation of planning and environmental policy.

The broad-ranging approach used in the evolution of interventions can be described using numerous terms such as : systemic, holistic, integrated, multilayered, multifaceted, inter-related, and multipronged. It has included the development of alliances and partnerships (Parker, 2005), and has been opportunistic and responsive, to take advantage of opportunities in a timely way.

Interventions have been made in various arenas, including the following:

- **Influencing government policy** and non government agencies to improve their knowledge of and interaction with the industry. Influencing policy development to trigger and facilitate cultural and organizational change in government agencies to improve the access of CLDB farmers to relevant information and resources, education and training;

- **Grass root community and industry development** with farmer groups to facilitate the development of solidarity, and so that they can more effectively lobby to have their needs and interests addressed;

- **Raising awareness of the issues in the urban community and consumer groups**, through mechanisms such as media coverage, development of farmers markets, and art exhibitions;

- **Specific interventions to influence planning policy**.

6. Examples of Interventions to Influence Policy Development in Government Agencies

(a) Whose Responsibility is it, Whose Problem is it, is there a Problem? : Formation of the Premier’s Task Force into Market Gardening by People of non English Speaking Background

Numerous representations to relevant government agencies about the lack of access of market gardeners to resources, and the ongoing removal of extension services from NSW Agriculture were unsuccessful. In 1995 we presented a report to the NSW Ethnic Affairs Commission as the agency with responsibility for access to services for groups from a different cultural background. This report was the direct trigger for the formation of the cross-sectoral Premier’s Task Force into Market Gardening by people of non English speaking background (Parker & Bandara, 1995, Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000).

The report highlighted the numerous government agencies with responsibility for providing services to the sector, while farmers lived in an information vacuum isolated from ethnospecific and mainstream services. They learnt from each other by trial and error.

We attribute the success of this report in obtaining government attention to its holistic, ethnographic case study approach, complemented by quantitative data. The report included narratives or stories of farmers, many of whom had come to Australia as refugees. Their stories exemplified hardship, tragedy, courage, and survival, together with their entrepreneurship and contribution to Sydney’s food supply and the economic, cultural, and social diversity of the region. For example, one Cambodian farmer arrived by boat in Australia, with his only map being a school atlas.

Leaving Cambodia was not easy. We had to escape from both armies. Along with many villagers my wife and four children we left the village one night in 1979. We couldn’t stay together fro very long. In the darkness of the night I was separated from my wife and children in the forest. We couldn’t talk in the dark, as we would be shot if any of the armies heard us. Nobody knew where the armies were hiding. I lost my family in the dark, but decided to continue to Thailand. My wife decided to go back to the village. I landed in Thailand in a refugee camp. One and a half years later I met with my wife and children in Thailand. This time my youngest son was not there as he dies in the forest during the first attempt to escape. He was only two and a half months old. We were lucky. There are still thousands of people who do not know the whereabouts of their partners. I lost everything. I brought here nothing. I found work in a factory within six days of arriving. I remember trying to find the factory. I was like a blind and dumb man, I didn’t know anything (because it was a strange country and I couldn’t speak English).
The report also highlighted the lack of knowledge of pesticides, highlighted alarming misuse, and emphasized that although 90% of market gardeners could not read English all pesticide information was only available in English.

The misuse of pesticides proved to be a “Trojan horse” to raise the awareness of the wide range of government agencies responsible for service provision to this sector. We hoped that it would be used to improve access to all services for this sector. The focus on pesticide use, however, meant that other important issues tended to be sidelined, particularly planning.

One of the terms of reference of the Premier's Task Force was to “better coordinate land use provisions that recognize the value of market gardening in the New South Wales economy”. However, the final report of the Task Force (NSW Government, 2000) did not effectively address this issue. Representatives of the then Department of Urban Affairs and Planning stated that this would be effectively dealt with by forthcoming regulations, and that it was not their direct responsibility, but rather that of NSW Agriculture to more effectively lobby for the agricultural sector.

Although deliberations of the Task Force were completed in 1998 the report was not available publicly until 2001. In 2001 the Sydney Morning Herald published the lack of government attention to the issue with the front-page story “Sydney’s Tainted Food Scandal”; and “Sydney’s Forgotten Farmers” (Parker, 2002). It focused on the importance of Sydney basin farmers and their contribution to Sydney’s food, but had the unexpected and unfortunate consequence of the scapegoating of Cambodian growers by agents in the markets who had been featured in the articles. Lacking English they could not read the newspapers themselves, but were told by the agents that their produce would be “black banned”. When I met with the growers to emphasize that the newspaper was attempting to force the government to act their response was “you throw a stone at the elephant and it comes back into out cooking pot”. This newspaper coverage did increase the focus of government agencies on CLDB farmers, but this focused largely on education and training, especially in pesticide use.

(b) Strategic Plan For Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Region

In 1998 The Hon Richard Amery, Minister for Agriculture in launching the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Agriculture-Sydney Region, an initiative of NSW Agriculture (now NSW Department of Primary Industries) noted “Sydney is under an increasing spotlight both nationally and internationally. Government and non-government institutions are planning for its future. The community consultation process [as presented in the plan] has validated sustainable agriculture and associated lands as credible and worthy components of the mixed pattern of human activity and land use by recognizing its potential to contribute a great deal to the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of the Sydney region. This is illustrated by the increasing recognition of these components and their benefits in planning documents such as the Metropolitan Strategy”. Most of the objectives of the Strategic Plan relate directly or indirectly to the need to recognize the importance of agriculture in the planning process, such as in the zoning of land, reducing conflict over land use, the recognition that agricultural land in the Sydney region is a finite resource, and that growth management of residential and industrial land uses in the Sydney region needs to be balanced with the necessity to maintain agriculture, and that the planning profession, state agencies and local government need to recognize the biophysical, social and economic values of agriculture.

In March 2002 participants at the conference “Securing Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Basin” (organized by NSW Agriculture) again highlighted that a key issue in securing the sustainability of Agriculture in the Sydney basin was that of urbanization and planning. The representative from Planning NSW presented a contentious paper which suggested that the major issue to be considered was that of future residential development and urban growth, and that essentially agriculture could be moved at will.

(C) Education and Training Plan for Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Region

NSW Agriculture believed that the main requirement of farmers was education and training to improve their sustainability. This plan, implemented under the auspices of NSW Agriculture and the Department of Education and Training, farmers did significantly improved access to training resources, but these have focused largely on pesticide use and environmental management, with limited attention to developing business skills, and no education or training in how farmers might be able to address the broader systemic issues impacting on their survival, such as urbanization and market forces, equitable interactions with planning authorities, and local government.

7. Industry and Community Development: Growers’ Associations

An important aspect of “making farmers matter” is on the ground community and industry development so that farmers can more effectively lobby for their interests. Associations generally reflect particular cultural groups. Before 1995 there were only two grower associations active in the Sydney basin, the Free
Growers, with most members from an “Anglo” or Maltese background, and the Australian Chinese Growers Association. The formation of the Australian Cambodian Growers Association (Parker & Suriyabanadara, 2000) led to growers have acknowledging that the Association has “given us a voice and we have to work together.” Since then an Australian Vietnamese Growers Association, and the Greenhouse Growers Association (mainly Lebanese) have been formed. Some associations are highly factionalised, possibly resulting from conflict in their countries of origin. There is no umbrella group to represent these associations. Peak industry bodies in NSW, such as NSW Farmers, have historically not included CLDB from the Sydney Basin, although recently it has taken more of an interest in the Sydney basin.

Farmers themselves do not necessarily present a united position, as their personal benefit may differ from that of other growers, and from the public good. Leaders of associations do not always represent the views of growers on urbanization, and may differ from their members, as they may be older, more established, and land owners, whereas more of the younger farmers lease land. Some leaders are themselves landowners, some with more than one farm, which they lease to others, often from the same ethnic group. The leaders of one association provided some insights into the issues. The first said, “Yes it (urbanization) is a problem for our members, but it is good for me”. The second noted that personally he wanted to sell his land, but “Where would others go?” And the third, who has considerable landholdings, said he “could not speak against the development as farmers wanted to sell their land and it was their hope for the future”.

8. Raising Awareness of the Broader Community

Early initiatives and the associated publicity has had a ripple effect, increasing the awareness of the urban community, leading to unexpected initiatives which further increase the consciousness of the urban community of the importance of agriculture, and the effects of urbanization. Every available opportunity, has been seized, such as attending workshops and seminars on the Metropolitan Strategy and asking relevant questions of presenters, especially politicians.

(a) Media Coverage

There has been extensive positive and sympathetic coverage of the issue of urbanization and the loss of farming and the rural lands in print, radio, and TV. The public response has always been one of great interest, and positive support (eg Sydney Morning Herald coverage in Good Living, December, 2006). A positive outcome of the public forum “From the outside looking in” (see later) was a Street Stories program by ABC Radio National entitled “Good- bye Buk Choy”. It told the stories of farmers from different backgrounds: a Maltese family, a Vietnamese woman, and a third generation farmer of Italian background who lamented: “the development’s all around, I’m too old to start again, and where could I go- the land’s too expensive- I guess I’ll have to sell, but it will break my heart”. The woman of Vietnamese background said: “Individually we are small, but all together we are important”. In early 2006 on a Sunday night a commercial radio program in Sydney highlighted the importance of market gardens. Many people rang in. Some were farmers working in their sheds to take the produce to market the next day. The announcer concluded, “It is a migrant success story”. My own experience has been that many people in the community have a connection with market gardening- such as through their parents, grandparents, or living in an area that contained market gardens.

(b) The Sydney Farmers Network (SFN)

This is a loose coalition of people members including people from all sides of politics, those with no political affiliation, and from urban and rural backgrounds, concerned about the future of agriculture on the fringe of Sydney. It can be described as an activist group dedicated to the proposition that urban and periurban agriculture is of paramount importance for a healthy city and its citizens- the city that must feed itself. The SFN is particularly important in that is has tapped into another level of the urban community, those valuing food, such as Chefs. A highly successful event was a dinner using only Sydney basin food, to which the Minister for Primary Industries (previously Agriculture) was invited, and spoke in praise of Sydney farmers, and their importance.

The group decided to intervene in practical ways, such as through initiating a farmers’ market for Sydney basin produce. Some of these markets were successful, others were not. Farmers market are seen as important in enabling farmers to diversify their marketing so that they are not dependent on supermarkets. Farmers’ markets are seen as being of value in that they bring a consciousness to the urban population of farming of the importance of farmers on the fringe in producing fresh food. However, farmers’ labour is often in short supply, and farmers themselves may be unable to devote time to what they see as a risky
venture. Given the success of those opposing the green zones (as discussed later) the possibility that placard waving is more likely to be successful in the short term for quick results must be acknowledged.

(c) The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
This alliance consists of an eclectic group of people from diverse backgrounds, and is concerned with the entire food system, with a particular focus on food security and the preservation of agricultural land. It includes urban agriculture, such as community gardens. It has had a very positive effect in raising awareness of the issues, especially through its networking with other groups, such as the Australian Conservation Foundation.

(d) The Greater Western Sydney Agricultural Heritage Initiative: Capturing the Memory of the Twentieth Century (auspiced by the Western Sydney Region of Councils (WSROC) and funded by the NSW Ministry for the Arts)
These projects demonstrate the ripple effect of the increased awareness of the importance of agriculture in the Sydney basin, and what is being lost to urbanization. Bringelly- City on the Edge, implemented by Liverpool Library, included the collection of oral histories, and a photographic exhibition in Liverpool library and on-line, and which received extensive media coverage. Recreating the Living Landscape, Agri/culture by Hawkesbury City Council, asked what were the significant changes socially, economically and culturally on these communities, collecting items for exhibition covering the period 1946-2000. The exhibition was reviewed in the Sydney Morning Herald, which commented that there was enough material to form the basis of several exhibitions based on specific themes, The Thirlmere exhibition. A permanent exhibition launched in association with the Estonian Association, told the little known story of Estonian poultry farmers at Thirlmere.

9. Intervention to Influence Planning Policy: Deliberative Planning, Community Engagement, Partnerships, and Participative Approaches
This intervention provides an example of linking attempts to influence government policy in the planning process through the involvement of politicians, with successful awareness raising of the broader community through extensive media coverage, and the direct participation of farmers so that their voice can be heard. The project was multidisciplinary, encompassing community development, environmental management, and planning. It was innovative through the adoption of a participative, deliberative approach, unlike the one-off consultation process used by many government agencies. Deliberative and participative practices include inquiring and learning together in the face of conflict and difference, coming to see issues in new ways leading to action together and practical public action (Forester, 1999). The concept encompasses the use of participatory planning processes and action research where the key ingredients are cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation; linking theory and practice; aiming to bring about change; and democratising the process through addressing issues of power; and reflection and learning of all participants. Deliberative and participative planning practice involves practical public action in messy political circumstances, and the micropolitics of practice. It involves how to do planning in a messy politicized world through the plural and conflicting experiences (stories) of differently affected citizens and stakeholders, and the consideration of values. The spaces described as outer urban or periurban pose particular difficulties for planners. Jean & Calenge (1997) noted that the spaces described as outer urban or periurban are seen by ruralists as creeping urban sprawl, distorting their field of study, and town specialists neglect these areas as a type of extremely undeveloped part of urbanity. Jean & Calenge argue that these spaces cannot be treated in isolation for they form part of a complex spatial system, which results from influences facing the infrastructure, notably economics and from the actions of the inhabitants. “These areas concentrate the states of a vanishing rurality and a spreading urbanity. The spoils are grabbed and formalized by various actors, mainly political, in a very variable and often conflicting manner.” These spaces are neither urban nor rural.

The trigger for this initiative came from the ongoing failure of government agencies to address the systemic issues related to planning for agriculture in the Sydney Basin and direct experience in assisting farmers in the development application process with local government. This initiative aimed to develop and implement a deliberative, participative planning process to improve the planning process and outcomes for sustainable agriculture by working with planning and environmental practitioners in local government and NSW Planning and the agricultural community. It was hoped that linking policy makers and bureaucrats with each other, and with the agricultural community, in a process where their experiences of the planning process and its outcomes were shared, would lead to increased learning by all participants, and improved public action. Land use planning involves two tiers of government: State
Government through NSW Planning, responsible for overall strategic planning, and Local Government, responsible for the implementation of policy at the local level and approval of development applications. In addition, other departments have relevant regulations, such as Land and Water Resources. The process facilitated community engagement between the public, private and community sectors, with the role of the University of Western Sydney being that of a catalyst, and a broker between diverse groups in a complex and messy political situation. It aimed to facilitate the well being and sustainability of the future of the region through working towards a more socially, ecologically and economically diverse region through balanced development which secures the sustainability of agriculture in the region. An additional aim was to enhance social capital through facilitating networks, and particularly by building links between the community and government agencies.

Implementation of Planning Intervention: From the Outside Looking in: The Future of the Rural Lands

A diverse planning group (a planning consultant, professionals from non-government and government agencies, and academics) developed the theme of “From the Outside Looking in: the Future of the Rural Lands”, to embody the need for a different approach to the issue, and developed and implemented a participative process consisting of:

1. A facilitated workshop of 60 “experts” from a range of professional and community backgrounds who normally have little opportunity to work together. Participants were identified through the networking and contacts of the planning group. A comprehensive document was prepared as background material for the participants (Sinclair et al, 2004). The sessions, demonstrating the holistic and systemic approach were organized around the themes of: scanning our world to identify the present trends and “drivers” influencing Sydney's current and future rural landscape identifying more enduring and resilient landscapes for Sydney; developing a vision, and the top vision themes, barriers and constraints, and thematic solutions, including urban expansion, biodiversity and environmental management, social and cultural aspects of lifestyle and landscape, and developing an integration mechanism to synthesis the multiplicity and complexity of the issue identified.

2. A public forum to engage the broader rural and urban communities and raise public awareness of the issues associated with the urbanization of the rural land, and specifically to engage politicians. The public forum was held at the same time as the NSW Government was releasing the Metropolitan Strategy to influence public policy at a critical stage in its development. The public forum was hosted by a local Council (Penrith) and opened by the Minister for Western Sydney, whose electorate includes many of the areas under consideration for urbanization. Experts from the previous workshop presented its outcomes with the key themes of irrigation, urban expansion and biodiversity, agriculture, water quality, and quantity, social and cultural aspects, and landscape and lifestyle.

The highlight was farmers from diverse backgrounds sharing their experiences, their stories, including a sixth generation Australian Dairy farmer, a woman of Maltese background growing vegetables, with eight sons, all of whom are farmers, and a greenhouse grower of Lebanese background. There was extensive media coverage by radio, TV, and newspapers, which was timely as it coincided with consultations on the Metropolitan Strategy. Participants from different backgrounds were enthusiastic about their participation and the process and appreciated the “coming together” to discuss the issues.

Key ingredients in the success of the approach included the ability of the university to act in an independent brokerage role as it was not constrained by government policy, since many government officers are unwilling or unable to critique government policy, timeliness, a high level of commitment by the participants to the importance of planning for the future of the rural lands, and the lack of previous opportunities to involve the community in this issue using an holistic, participative approach.

The key concern was how to sustain the momentum and enthusiasm so that it was not “just another talk fest”. Although we had achieved a high level of community engagement, action needed to be ongoing to address the hopes of the participants. It highlighted the importance of achieving outcomes to minimize skepticism, and to ensure that the participation and engagement of the community and stakeholders in such processes is worthwhile and can influence policy.

10. The Power of Public Protest

The Metropolitan Strategy initially contained “green zones”, which may have provided some protection for agriculture. However, there was a highly effective and public protest campaign, led by those who wanted to develop their land, with public demonstrations outside local council meetings claiming, “we are a communist state”. Those who did not want to develop their land felt intimidated, and there appeared to be little or no participation by farmers. The proposed green zones were abandoned by the NSW State Government.
Planners involved with the Metropolitan Strategy claimed that they received numerous submissions arguing for the abolition of the green zones, but almost none on the future of agriculture. However, the Sydney Farming Network, and the Food Fairness Alliance, both of which represent a range of groups and individuals did make submissions. Moreover, one allegation made by a planning bureaucrat was that NSW DPI at the very beginning of the development of the plan had stated that even if all the farming in the Sydney basin was lost there would be little impact on the produce available to the Sydney consumer. This is despite the figures produced by NSW DPI and cited earlier (Gillespie & Mason, 2002)

Both the current and previous Ministers for Agriculture have publicly stated their support for Sydney basin agriculture. An additional consultancy report provided input into the completed Metropolitan Strategy, but this was undertaken after the political decision to designate the NW and SW as growth centres had been made. It was noted that this planning should have happened “years ago” well before the development of the decision on the current designated growth areas.

11. Reflections, Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has described interventions at multiple entry points to make periurban farmers matter as the survival of small family farms near Sydney is important for farmers’ livelihoods and for Sydney as a sustainable healthy city, and for feeding Sydney. My initial motivation was one of social justice, believing that these marginalized farmers had a right to information, and a right to be included in decisions affecting their livelihood, including urbanization. I emphasized the economic and social value of farming, thinking that it would lead to a focus on the impact of urbanization, and that an improvement in service provision by government agencies would enable the industry to better equipped to survive in the face of increasing urbanization and market forces, rather than these farmers being eliminated by default. Improved education and training increased the interaction between growers and professionals in government agencies, which led to both an increased understanding of government requirements by farmers, and increased knowledge of the industry by key government agencies, but has been very limited in assisting farmers to articulate their broader political interests. Although the interventions had a major impact in raising awareness of government agencies to the presence of CLDB farmers, their response sometimes was a grudging one, with negative attitudes of some service providers persisting, so that and the sustainability of these initiatives is unclear.

The broader political and systemic issues associated with urbanization, were not addressed, even though they formed one of the terms of reference of the Premier’s Task Force, and the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Agriculture in the Sydney Basin emphasized their social and economic importance to Sydney’s food supply.

Economic and social justice arguments alone were insufficient to influence planning decisions. This failure to address the need for these farms is attributed first to the widespread belief and response that Economic and social justice arguments alone were sufficient to influence planning decisions. However, the Sydney Farming Network, and the Food Fairness Alliance, both of which represent a range of groups and individuals did make submissions. Moreover, one allegation made by a planning bureaucrat was that NSW DPI at the very beginning of the development of the plan had stated that even if all the farming in the Sydney basin was lost there would be little impact on the produce available to the Sydney consumer. This is despite the figures produced by NSW DPI and cited earlier (Gillespie & Mason, 2002)
this particular land in Sydney targeted for development, as it will result in maximum displacement of farmers, as well as posing difficulties for developers as the land has fragmented ownership. In Sydney there appears to be the beginning of a groundswell of support for the continuation of peri-urban agriculture, and some “mobilization of public opinion”, with a shift in focus from agricultural production per se to the desirability of food security and local food production. The value of local fresh food has gained in importance over recent years, which can be as a social movement, with the growing importance of farmers’ markets, and recognition of the importance of small family farms, rather than agribusiness. However, this may not yet be a “match” for the influence of those wanting development. It is unlikely that the farmers described in this paper would be involved in public demonstrations against urbanization as most are more concerned about their immediate survival, they lack knowledge of the political system, and are time poor. It is therefore imperative to convince the general community, especially those with political influence, and politicians, of the public good of retaining peri-urban agriculture.

References