

National food system reporting

‘Seeing’ Australia’s future food system

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Photography

Unless otherwise captioned, the photographs used in this report were taken by Jenny Cuerel at the Food System Horizons Launch on 19 June 2024 at Customs House in Brisbane.

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About Food System Horizons

Food System Horizons is a joint initiative of The University of Queensland and CSIRO. It is marshalling science to help Australians understand the food system, their roles in it, and who they need to work with to develop a more sustainable, nutritious and equitable food system. Food System Horizons is a **network of researchers and experts** who work together to synthesise knowledge, catalyse change, and produce leading research in food systems. We are an expanding community that welcomes new partners and collaborators.

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by the generous participation of all those who attended the official launch of Food System Horizons. The event was held in Meanjin, Brisbane, on the land of the Turrbal and Jagera peoples and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We had the privilege of being welcomed to this event by Uncle Billy Cummings, an Aboriginal Elder who lives in Brisbane where he is linked to the Turrbal People through kinship ties. The authors would especially like to thank those who spoke, participated in panels, or supported both the design and conduct of the workshop process. We owe special thanks to the workshop facilitators and note takers who captured the thinking on the day, from which this report has been crafted.



The authors acknowledge that the process of aggregating the rich conversation from this dialogue into themes has been done using language that reflects our cultural, institutional and disciplinary perspectives. We've made a significant effort to ensure that the report reflects the intent of the participants, acknowledging that individuals across the community often use different terms to express similar intent.

Panel speakers

- Emma-Kate Rose, Executive Director, Food Connect Foundation
- Rachel Chalmers, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
- Katie McRobert, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Farm Institute
- Jess Watkinson, Chief Executive Officer, Foodbank Queensland
- Heidi Aspinall, Sustainability Manager, Suncorp Bank
- Madonna Thompson, Chair, Nyanda Life Limited

Table facilitators and notetakers

Ammar Abdul Aziz
Jessica Bogard
Sinead Boylan
Jeremy Farr
Selina Fyfe
Cecile Godde

Andy Hall
Damian Hine
Pablo Juliano
Pradeepa Korale-Gedara
Larelle McMillan
Enayat Moallemi

David Reynolds
Kiah Smith
Yuba Subedi
Yasmina Sultanbawa
Olivia Wright

Key points

- Australians have growing aspirations for our food system – we want to be able to meet sustainability, health and social inclusion goals alongside economic goals
- A problem is we can't 'see' these goals to progress towards them, because current approaches to analysing and reporting on Australia's food system have evolved to focus on economic goals
- Through the dialogue reported here, 70 of Australia's food system leaders laid out the narratives they want to be able to tell about Australia's food system, and what it should look like into the future
- The evidence required to validate and communicate these narratives is a strong demand signal to national institutions regarding the types of food system analysis we need
- Australia's food system leaders want national reporting that:
 - recognises a broader set of food system participants and contributions
 - reveals where the food system is failing vulnerable groups
 - supports a common understanding of what our future food system should look like, and
 - evaluates more holistic approaches to food system governance.
- Through Food System Horizons, CSIRO and The University of Queensland will use this report to convene discussions with public sector reporting agencies about the data and analysis that should be provided in response to the demand expressed by food system leaders.



Summary

This report provides evidence from Australia’s food system leaders that more holistic analysis and reporting is needed across Australia’s food system. Current systems for collecting, analysing and reporting on Australia’s food system have been designed to meet sector-specific economic goals. Reporting to meet economic goals remains vital, but now needs to be expanded to report on broader sustainability, health and social inclusion goals. One way to capture the demand for more holistic food reporting is to gather the narratives that food system leaders want to share about Australia’s food system and what it should look like into the future. The evidence needed to validate and communicate these narratives provides reporting agencies with a strong demand signal for the types of data and analysis needed.

This report documents the views of 70 food system leaders brought together in Meanjin, Brisbane, for the launch of Food System Horizons in June 2024. It is a foundational contribution to encouraging an ongoing national conversation about the reporting systems we need to manage Australia’s food system into the future.

The narratives shared by food system leaders revealed five themes that they want to share about Australia’s food system and what it should look like into the future:

1. The unusual suspects: Recognising the different actors in the food system
2. No more surprise chains: Seeing the arrows, not just the boxes
3. Gross domestic food happiness? Creating a common language
4. Valuable stories: Nurturing emerging narratives based on shared values
5. A Minister for Food? Governance options for the food system

The authors have interpreted the rich narratives under these themes into demand signals for future national food system reporting. In general, food system leaders want to augment reporting on economic goals, and begin reporting more deeply on sustainability, health and social inclusion goals. They think that an important first step toward doing this is for national food reporting systems to recognise a broader set of participants across Australia’s food system. They want reporting systems that can assess the ways in which the food system is suspected of failing vulnerable groups, and that help to reveal options for addressing these failures. They want foresighting mechanisms that create a common language for understanding and reconciling views about what Australia’s future food system should look like. They also want an evidence base for evaluating new and more holistic approaches to food system governance, such as the creation of government food portfolios.

Through Food System Horizons, CSIRO and The University of Queensland will use this report to convene discussions with public sector reporting agencies about the data and analysis we should collectively be providing in response to the demand expressed by food system leaders.



Introduction

This report seeks to provide evidence from food system leaders across Australia that more holistic analysis and reporting is needed for Australia's food system. Current systems for collecting, analysing and reporting on components of our food system were designed to meet economic goals within important sectors of the food system, such as agriculture. These reporting systems have served this purpose well and have contributed to Australia's economic success. There is now growing concern from food system leaders that economic reporting needs to be complemented with monitoring and reporting of other imperatives – especially sustainability, health and social inclusion.

One way to document this changing demand for national food system reporting is by exploring the evidence required to validate and communicate the narratives that food system leaders want to 'tell' about Australia's food system, and what it should look like into the future. This report documents the views of 70 food system leaders brought together in Meanjin, Brisbane for the launch of Food System Horizons in June 2024. It calls for a national conversation designed to ensure we have the reporting systems we need to manage Australia's food system into the future.

Why more holistic reporting?

Australia's food system includes all the processes of producing, distributing and consuming food and food ingredients, from natural resources like water and soils that support agricultural production, through the manufacturing, processing and distribution of food, to its impacts on nutrition and human health. Submissions to recent government inquiries reveal that Australians expect a lot from our food system, and that our aspirations for Australia's food system are growing. We want the food system to meet multiple and often conflicting goals, such as prosperous livelihoods for farmers as well as affordable and nutritious food for all. We want a sustainable environment from low impact agriculture and manufacturing. We orient our economy to export bulk commodities while wanting rich cultural experiences involving foods from niche local, Indigenous and overseas manufacturers. We want large food retailing businesses to provide us with the cost and quality advantages of scale economies while also providing affordable and nutritious food to remote, Indigenous and vulnerable communities. As the saying goes – “we want it all, and we want it now!”.

This report is a first step in exploring whether the pursuit of new and more diverse goals for our food system is likely to require new and more diverse forms of information and analysis. Current approaches to measuring and analysing agricultural and food systems evolved to report on economic goals, and these goals remain vital into the future. We focus on the productivity of our export industries because this is what determines our competitiveness in world markets. We celebrate economic success in terms of the gross value of agricultural production and exports, and to set goals for future growth. We absolutely want ongoing economic success from our food system, but that's not all we want.

While we've been focusing on economic goals we've been accumulating a range of sustainability, health and social inclusion challenges. We find these difficult to manage because they are less well defined and measured – we cannot sufficiently 'see' these challenges to manage the processes causing them. Sustainability, health and social inclusion challenges are often the unintended by-products of profit-driven commercial activity, and are not adequately revealed by the indicators we use to monitor progress towards economic goals. 'Seeing' the food system in all its complexity, requires more holistic metrics and analysis to understand and manage important interactions between economic productivity, sustainability, health and social inclusion across the food system.

Australia is also coming under increasing pressure to join global efforts to report on sustainability, health and social inclusion goals alongside economic goals. These are obligations that Australia accepts as a member of organisations such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Meeting future global reporting obligations is likely to require more holistic reporting across the food system, and more systemic understanding and reporting of food system interactions. It will also focus Australia’s contribution to the design of emerging global standards for food system reporting, and ensure that global methodologies align with Australian conditions and sovereign interests.

Food System Horizons dialogue

A crucial step to proactively manage Australia’s food system is for key decision makers in the community, industry and government to be able to ‘see’ the system more holistically. Food System Horizons is convening a national dialogue about ways in which existing reporting systems could be augmented to better reveal important dimensions of the food system, and interactions between them. This will enable greater vision and better management of Australia’s food system into the future.

Food System Horizons is a joint initiative of The University of Queensland and CSIRO. It is marshalling science from Australia’s most globally recognised university and Australia’s national science agency to raise awareness of the food system and the system-wide interactions that affect productivity, sustainability, health and social inclusion. On 19 June 2024, as part of the launch of Food System Horizons, a face-to-face dialogue of food system leaders was held in Meanjin, Brisbane to explore the question ‘What could a national food system reporting initiative allow us to do?’.

Over 70 food system leaders participated in the dialogue, spanning a wide range of sectors and functions. Participants were invited to provide broad perspectives on the issues surrounding diverse food system components, outcomes and drivers (Figure 1).

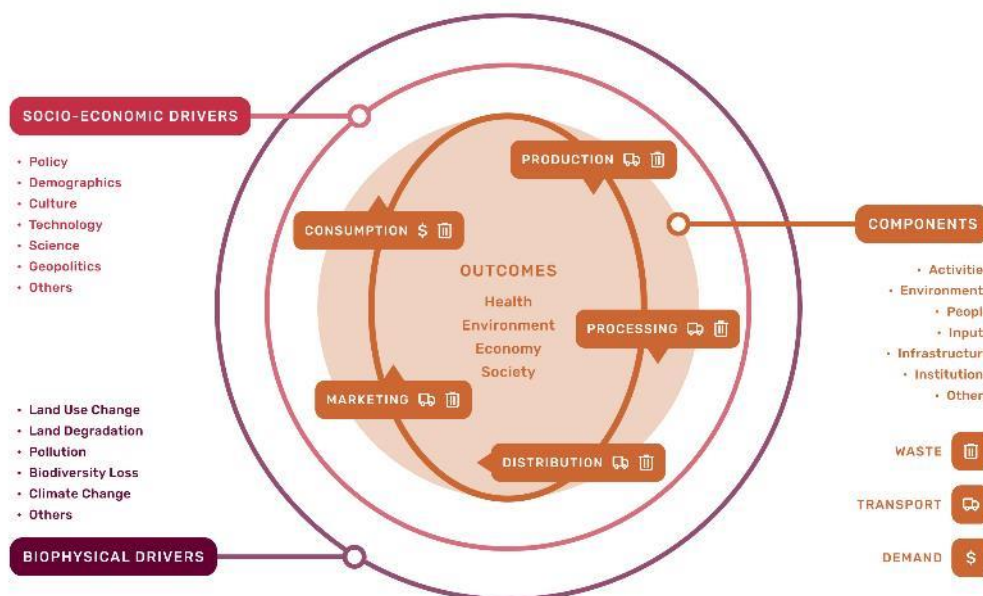


Figure 1 The food system with its components, outcomes and drivers

Invitees were selected to ensure a balanced voice from leaders across the food system, which included industry and civil society leaders as well as researchers and government representatives. The invite list was shaped toward understanding the demand for a national reporting system, rather than designing one. The intent was to have a room full of people who could share their perspectives of food system practice, rather

than analyse existing data. Specific efforts were made to balance gender voices and to seek Indigenous insights into our food systems and how we manage them.

Approach

CSIRO's Dr Rohan Nelson, Director of Food System Horizons, provided a framing presentation for the discussion. He explored the potential of a national reporting system to help critically analyse and validate emerging narratives calling for more holistic management of Australia's agriculture and food systems. A recorded version of the presentation can be viewed [online](#). The presentation explored the limitations of our current focus on a small number of economic metrics, and demonstrated the value of more holistic interpretations of existing metrics.

The presentation was followed by table-based discussions of 8 to 10 participants running for 40 minutes designed by Food System Horizons co-lead and engagement specialist, CSIRO's Dr Lilly Lim-Camacho. Each table had a facilitator, note-taker and secondary facilitator, who supported the participants to discuss the following questions:

- What is the most critical narrative you wish you could tell about our food system?
- How could a nationally coordinated food reporting system provide evidence to validate and support this narrative?

At the end of the discussion, table facilitators reported back to the room. A panel of food system leaders were selected to respond to these reports and share their own perspectives on the value of a more holistic national food reporting system.

The panel comprised of:

- Emma-Kate Rose, Executive Director, Food Connect Foundation
- Rachel Chalmers, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
- Katie McRobert, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Farm Institute
- Jess Watkinson, Chief Executive Officer, Foodbank Queensland
- Heidi Aspinall, Sustainability Manager, Suncorp Bank
- Madonna Thompson, Chair, Nyanda Life Limited



Image 1 Dialogue panel participants and speakers, from left: Emma-Kate Rose, Rachel Chambers, Katie McRobert, Jess Watkinson, Heidi Aspinall, Madonna Thompson and Rohan Nelson. Photo by Olivia Wright.

Discussion points and insights were synthesized by the Food System Horizons team, consolidated from notes taken during both table-based and plenary discussions.

This study has been approved by CSIRO's Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2023).

What would a national reporting system help us do?

The unusual suspects: Recognising the different actors in the food system

Revealing actors in the food system - and their influence on decisions that affect food system outcomes - was highlighted by four of the six discussion tables as a priority for national food system reporting. There was agreement that recognition of food system actors is imbalanced, with some actors 'invisible' or under-recognised. Examples of food system actors that participants viewed as insufficiently recognised included: Indigenous peoples, women in farming, the food relief sector and young people.

A past focus on supply chain actors was thought to concentrate food system performance assessments on value-adding activities that deliver economic gain. This corresponds with a focus on production, commodity exports, manufacturing and delivery of private goods and services, and an under-recognition of the public good social, environmental and health impacts of the food system. Participants felt that a lack of data leads to a lack of visibility, that in turn leads to a lack of understanding of how the food system delivers impact. This was seen to have implications for our food system's trajectory, and the pathways we might pursue to create a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Insight and evidence points

Key questions that a national food reporting system should provide insights into, included:

- Who are the actors in the food system? What are the demographics (age, gender) of actors across the different activities in the food system?
- How can we better recognise Indigenous Australians' contributions to our food system?
- Who are the decision-makers in the food system? How does this influence how we talk about our food system?
- Who does what in Australia's food system? How much food is produced, by whom, where? And where is it consumed?
- What business models contribute to private and public goods delivered by the food system?

Drawing from literature: Inclusive systems thinking



Stakeholder participation in integrated assessment and modelling¹ has long been recognised as critical for ensuring that model outcomes are useful (Hamilton, et al. 2015). Alongside methodological options for embracing complexity (as in the case of using system dynamic models) and actor roles (as in the case of agent-based modelling)², stakeholder participation seems to be the key strategy in ensuring that systems analysis is inclusive (Monasterolo, et al. 2016). Debate remains over what degree of stakeholder participation is sufficient, and how best to implement it. Are there strategies in place to recognise biases we all have around whose perspectives to include or rely on?

¹ Hamilton, S.H., ElSawah, S., Guillaume, J.H., Jakeman, A.J. and Pierce, S.A., 2015. Integrated assessment and modelling: overview and synthesis of salient dimensions. *Environmental Modelling & Software*, 64, pp.215-229.

² Monasterolo, I., Pasqualino, R., Janetos, A.C. and Jones, A., 2016. Sustainable and inclusive food systems through the lenses of a complex system thinking approach—a bibliometric review. *Agriculture*, 6(3), p.44.

No more surprise chains: Seeing the arrows, not just the boxes

A lack of understanding about how the food system delivers impact is strongly linked to a low recognition of the full range of food system actors. Participants raised the need for a national reporting system to map connections and relationships between stakeholders and impacts. This would enable a better understanding of how the different parts of the food system contribute to broader outcomes outside of those routinely monitored and measured.

An example was how the food relief sector operates via ‘surprise chains’. While standard supply chains thrive off certainty and predictability that supports just-in-time operations for well-known consumer needs, the opposite is the case for the food relief sector. The sector relies on excess production and waste to feed those in need. These are inherently sporadic sources, which limit the ability to forecast and anticipate the type and volume of food likely to be available, and highlight a lack of understanding of how food waste is generated versus where it is most needed.

These interlinked questions are typical of complex systems. Interdependencies in complex systems are often dynamic and difficult to quantify. Participants highlighted the need to avoid the twin risks of either oversimplifying or overcomplicating interdependencies by building a shared understanding and common language around Australia’s food system.

Insight and evidence points

The need to recognise a greater range of actors, components, drivers and the interactions between them revealed several questions that participants wanted better analytical insights into, including:

- How much food is lost? When and where might food waste be generated? What impact does food waste and food relief have on the environment?
- Why aren’t Australian families getting enough nutrition from available food?
- What is the true cost of food? And what is the true cost of food insecurity?

Unsurprisingly, it was thought that a national food reporting system should also address questions surrounding how the food system operates, including what drives processes now and into the future. These included:

- How can we bring Indigenous knowledge systems into the way we approach our food system?
- How is our food system changing? What is triggering change? What role does innovation (no matter how small) have in the change? (See discussion point box)
- How can we better allocate resources (inputs, products, byproducts) to meet multiple objectives? What processes would help us do that?
- What is driving Australian food choices? How are attitudes and perceptions of the food system changing?

Participant perspective: Better comprehending food system innovation



A question was raised during discussions on what the role of new industries and innovative technologies might be for meeting demand, and the implications of this from a food systems’ perspective. A discussion followed on the sovereignty of Australian food manufacturing, and government roles in cultivating an environment conducive to nascent industries. The question of how innovation takes place within the food system was raised, along with the importance of recognising different scales of innovation – from small to large.

Gross domestic food happiness? Creating a common language

There was general agreement that stakeholders across the food system use inconsistent language and terminologies, and that a national food reporting system could help to harmonise this. A lack of common language compounds the risks of oversimplification or overcomplication raised earlier but can also lead to developing strategies that don't achieve the goals and outcomes they were designed for.

A common language is not simply about defining terms, but also about unpacking values. Once again this links to the recognition of diverse food system actors, and their diverse perspectives and vision. A common language was considered necessary to support a shared vision because it allows food system stakeholders to express and identify common values.

Simplified messages were considered a starting point for building a common language but were also thought to serve as a way of enhancing stakeholder interactions. Simpler messaging means clearer information flows between sectors, and between producers and consumers. Mainstreaming food system concepts was also raised as a possible strategy, as well as increasing public awareness and literacy about the food system by making terms accessible, friendly and designed at getting people on board.

Drawing from literature: Why meaning matters



Recent assessment³ of Food Policy for Canada (FPC) has shown that if “assessed by the measure of food insecurity promulgated by Statistics Canada, the effectiveness of the FPC in reducing Canadian food insecurity will primarily depend on the extent to which it improves household incomes and/or lowers food prices” (Deaton & Scholz, 2022, p.303). The adopted meaning of food insecurity and importantly the way it is measured serves as a key criterion for success or failure of the policy. But what if a different *meaning* was used?

Insight and evidence points

A common language was seen as helpful for guiding the design of a national food reporting system. Clarity of meaning for key terms was raised. These included: food ('What do we even define as food?'), sustainability ('everyone has their own definition'), impact ('is it just negative?') and food security ('whose security?' and 'is it just food that we need to secure?').

Participant perspective: A journey of understanding



One group discussed the different ways food systems can be conceptualised. A question was raised about how discussions of the food system relate to Indigenous peoples. The group agreed we need to ensure that conversations are inclusive of diverse perspectives and needs. It was noted that the way Indigenous peoples view food systems is highly diverse across different groups, geographies and individuals, and can be very different from the current ways that Indigenous foods are conceived by the rest of Australian society. The common binaries of humans and nature, used as a taxonomic system in Western sciences, does not apply to Indigenous peoples of Australia: “Environment is Country, and people, who are its stewards, are a part of Country.” It was agreed that understanding each other's languages when it comes to food systems is a journey.

³ Deaton, B. J., & Scholz, A. (2022). Food security, food insecurity, and Canada's national food policy: Meaning, measures, and assessment. *Outlook on Agriculture*, 51(3), 303-312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00307270221113601>

Valuable stories: Nurturing emerging narratives based on shared values

How do we want to talk about our food system? And what does this say about what we value? There was recognition among dialogue participants that there is a wide range of values in the food system, and an aspiration for 'shared values' to surface. National and more holistic food system reporting would allow this range of values to be identified, discussed and recognised, allowing for greater legitimacy of measures and objectives. Participants raised how data used to report on the performance of Australia's food system, can drive change if framed in a way that reflects the values of stakeholders. At the same time, it was raised that biases and vested interests can shift the way we measure and describe our food system, shaping the story towards certain values that may not be shared broadly in Australian society. There are a range of narratives that we can choose to tell.

One of the definitions of the term 'narrative' in the Oxford Languages dictionary is "a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values". Shared values are not only crucial for a common language, but also underpin our ability to nurture emerging narratives that represent diverse perspectives. How we choose to tell the story of Australia's food system will reflect what we find important, and shape what we support.

Food system approaches provide a framework for creating narratives that identify relationships between actors and activities in the food system, such as the connection between food production activities and public health. They can also allow us to expand narratives about areas that we may feel discomfort about, such as social justice, and provide us with different pathways to change. A national reporting system may allow us to reveal deep concerns about interactions across the food system that are not well served by current analytical and reporting systems, and allow us to better explore a diversity of needs.

Drawing from literature: Credibility, salience and legitimacy



The call for a national food reporting system is based on the premise that with better information, we are able to make better decisions. Much work has been done in better understanding what makes science and knowledge effective in influencing decision-making, particularly the role that credibility, salience and legitimacy play in complex but effective assessments (Farrell & Jäger, 2010⁴). They are defined by Cash et al (2003⁵) as such:

- **"Credibility** involves the scientific adequacy of the technical evidence and arguments
- **Salience** deals with the relevance of the assessment to the needs of decision makers
- **Legitimacy** reflects the perception that the production of information and technology has been respectful of stakeholders' divergent values and beliefs, unbiased in its conduct, and fair in its treatment of opposing views and interests."

Ensuring that the insights generated by a national reporting system are credible, salient and legitimate, means bringing together multiple knowledge systems, including Indigenous knowledge. This can be challenging, as different knowledge holders view systems in different ways, and the values around different forms of knowledge may also differ (Wheeler & Root-Bernstein, 2020)⁶.

⁴ Farrell, A.E. and Jäger, J. eds., 2006. *Assessments of Regional and Global Environmental Risks: Designing Processes for the Effective Use of Science in Decision Making*. Resources for the Future.

⁵ Cash, D.W., Clark, W.C., Alcock, F., Dickson, N.M., Eckley, N., Guston, D.H., Jäger, J. and Mitchell, R.B., 2003. Knowledge systems for sustainable development. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 100(14), pp.8086-8091.

⁶ Wheeler, H.C. and Root-Bernstein, M., 2020. Informing decision-making with Indigenous and local knowledge and science. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 57(9), pp.1634-1643.

A Minister for Food? Governance options for the food system

The complexity of the food system, its diverse outcomes, stakeholders, and their needs require institutional arrangements capable of engaging with this complexity. Participants at the dialogue discussed the types of governance required for a national reporting system to legitimately serve the diverse needs of a complex food system. Such governance would enable the capacity building and training needed to develop and maintain connected, transparent and efficient reporting systems, and drive impact by supporting the ability to act on information gained through reporting.

Different layers of governance were raised:

- The need for an overarching *framework* that recognises the multiple objectives of the food system
- The need to recognise who *owns* the narrative of the shared food system – and the ‘home’ for it
- The need to have *a mechanism* that brings together different portfolios across government to collaborate on food-related issues
- The need to improve *participation and inclusion* of a broader range of voices and groups as contributors to food system decision-making
- The merit of consolidating data and insight in *one place* to enable and enhance access for all
- The importance of engendering *trust* across food system stakeholders, in order to facilitate sharing and communication
- The recognition that *institutions* needed to commission and oversee a fully integrated national food reporting system do not currently exist, and that the stakeholders that can motivate and help design it only have a diffuse voice scattered across diverse existing institutions.

The discussion indicated that a national food reporting system would need centralised motivation and funding, but could be delivered via decentralised institutions working together. This is consistent with principles that have emerged for governing other types of common property resource, in which nested forms of governance bring together the strengths of national, state and local jurisdictions. This could mean national leadership to fund and coordinate design with state agencies, especially of underlying data systems, with local and state governments shaping key narratives and insights.

Participant perspective: National vs state level governance



The scale of governance arrangements was raised at the dialogue, where national vs state-based approaches were discussed. One group discussed that in order to develop a unified and consistent plan for the entire country with coherence and uniformity nationwide, a national approach was required. Although a state-based approach allows for customised solutions to regional contexts and challenges, it may not effectively drive the necessary change across diverse stakeholders dispersed throughout the country. Differences in strategies and regulations may also hinder coordination. A national approach which can integrate state and regional flexibility offers strong potential.

Possible pathways: International efforts towards food policy



There has been international recognition that there are a multitude of challenges facing society that stem from – and impact on – food systems. Several multi-country reviews have been conducted in recent years, including the consideration of a common food policy for Europe⁷, food policy councils⁸ and learnings from food policy innovations in the context of a desired national food strategy for the UK⁹. Common across these reviews is the recognition that modern food systems present complex challenges that no department or agency can single-handedly tackle within their remit – these challenges require multi-sectoral approaches and joint governance.

Several nations have structures in place to develop and/or implement a national food policy with varying degrees of success. Of note are Canada, with ‘**Food Policy for Canada**’ and the UK, where an independent review of ‘**A National Food Strategy**’ has been conducted. Likewise, Australia has long attempted to develop a national approach. The 2013 ‘**National Food Plan**’ is an example, and more recently, the ‘**Food System Roadmap**’ renewed the focus on food systems thinking. Civil society organisations have also recognised the need for more inclusive and coordinated approaches. The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance’s ‘**People’s Food Plan**’ is an example.

⁷ De Schutter, O., Jacobs, N. and Clément, C., 2020. A ‘Common Food Policy’ for Europe: How governance reforms can spark a shift to healthy diets and sustainable food systems. *Food Policy*, 96, p.101849. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2020.101849>

⁸ Schiff, R., Levkoe, C.Z. and Wilkinson, A., 2022. Food policy councils: a 20-year scoping review (1999–2019). *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 6, p.868995. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2022.868995>

⁹ Walton, S. & Hawkes, C. (2020). *What We Can Learn: A Review of Food Policy Innovations in Six Countries*. UK: National Food Strategy. <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/24918/>

Conclusions

This national dialogue, as part of the launch of Food System Horizons, has revealed some of the deep narratives that food system leaders want to tell about Australia's food system, and how they want it to look into the future.

Food system leaders want national food reporting systems to recognise a broader set of participants in the food system, and in so doing address a perception that current reporting favours more economically visible participants. They want to know *who* makes decisions about the food system, and to be able to talk about the shifting demographics of people who work in the food system, and the people impacted by it.

Food system leaders want food reporting systems that reveal the food security of vulnerable groups, and that provide the evidence necessary to monitor and ensure food security for these groups. They would like evidence to validate and communicate ways in which the food system is suspected of failing vulnerable groups, and strategies for addressing these failures. A focal point is the future role of waste in the food system, and informing the trade-offs between reducing waste and finding new sources of food provisioning beyond food welfare.

Another goal for food system reporting is the revealing and reconciling of, shared values about what the food system is, and what it should look like into the long term future. Food system leaders want to explore how national food system reporting could be strengthened to include more routine foresighting mechanisms. These could be used to routinely bring together alternative perspectives on the food system, and to create a common language for understanding and reconciling choices surrounding future pathways. A step forward is to embrace more diverse knowledge systems including those of Indigenous peoples and more diverse groups across society.

Food system leaders also see a need for new governance mechanisms to manage the complexity of the food system. They are particularly concerned about who is responsible for overseeing the public policy surrounding Australia's food system, who participates in decision making, and whether the right mechanisms are in place to achieve policy coherence across all levels of government. New and more holistic institutions such as government food portfolios have advantages and disadvantages. What is needed first is an evidenced base to evaluate their potential.

Next steps

This dialogue has revealed a challenge shared by many food system leaders: we don't yet have the comprehensive and robust analytical systems to validate, refine and translate our aspirations for the food system, into action. Our current food system and its reporting mechanisms evolved to meet economic goals using economic metrics, and these will remain vital into the future. The narratives documented here reveal growing demand to expand and rebalance reporting on economic goals with reporting on sustainability, health and social inclusion goals.

Path dependencies and institutional lock-ins are likely to make this challenging. No single portfolio of government is responsible for the food system, or the concerted national effort needed to realign reporting systems to changing policy goals. External signals that food policy goals are changing are muted because current reporting systems act as a mirror reinforcing current goals, rather than a lens for viewing future goals. The risk here is that our reporting systems fail to self-adapt to changing policy goals and lose relevance and responsiveness to changing social values. Allowing current reporting systems to gradually lose relevance foregoes low cost opportunities to adapt them to changing policy goals, and avoids high cost scenarios where whole new systems need to be created when failures become critical.

An alternative is to bring governments, industry, community and research agencies together to assess changing policy goals and design robust and low cost improvements to food-related reporting systems. Through Food System Horizons, CSIRO and The University of Queensland are convening discussions with public sector reporting agencies about the data and analysis we should collectively be providing in response to the demand expressed by food system leaders in this report.

**Food System Horizons –
Catalysing a sustainable,
nutritious and equitable food
system futures**

Contact us | foodsystemhorizons.org

Food System Horizons is a collaborative initiative between The University of Queensland and CSIRO.

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