



ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS IN NORTHERN QUEENSLAND



Dr Breda McCarthy



Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia
(SEGRA) Conference,
Coffs Harbour, October 16-18th, 2013

Challenge 5: How Might we Best Develop Northern
Australia?

'ALTERNATIVE' FOOD SYSTEMS - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



- ◉ Sustainable food systems (Selfa et al., 2008)
- ◉ Sustainable agriculture refers to 'the use of farming practices and systems which maintain or enhance the economic viability of agricultural production; the natural resource base; and other ecosystems, which are influenced by agricultural activities' (Standing Committee of Agriculture in Australia, SCA, 1991).
- ◉ Refers to local and organically-produced food systems
 - Producers as consumers, i.e., community gardens
 - Producer-consumer partnerships, i.e., community supported agriculture (CSAs)
 - Direct sell initiatives, i.e., farmers' markets, farm gate sales, box delivery schemes, farm open days.
 - Specialist retailers, i.e., online grocers

WHY ALTERNATIVE?

- ◉ Localised food supply chains have been linked with rural development (Marsden and Sonnino, 2005), regional tourism development (Du Rand, Heath and Alberts, 2003), community development (Ikerd, 2002; Robinson, Robinson, Carpio and Hughes, 2009) and social capital building (Cocklin, 2005; Seyfang, 2006)
- ◉ Climate change poses a serious threat to Queensland (Garnaut, 2008)
- ◉ National Food Plan *Our Food Our Future* (2012)
 - the local food economy needs to be supported
 - community food grants of \$1.5m promoted in 2013
- ◉ Queensland Food Strategy *Food for a Growing Economy* (2011)
 - food systems are seen as fragile due to natural disasters and community-based food production is one way of building resilient communities and more resilient local food supply chains

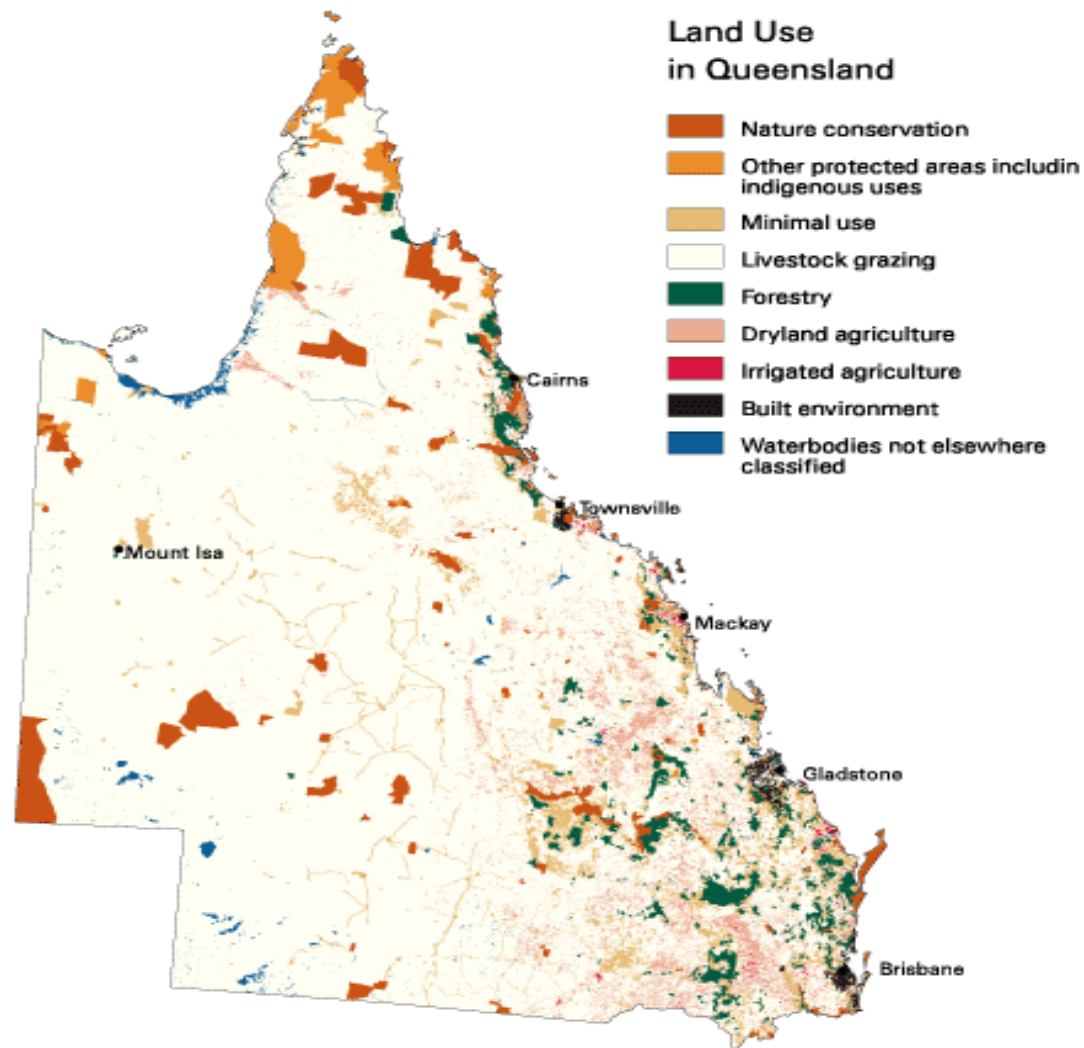
WHY ALTERNATIVE?

- The organic food market is one of **the fastest growing food sectors** in Australia, with growth rates in the domestic retail market averaging 50% from 2008 from 2010 (Australian Organic Market Report, 2010).
- The Australian organic sector, from meat and vegetables to grain and cosmetics, is valued at **\$1.27 billion** (The Biological Farmers of Australia, The Australian Organic Market Report 2012).



WHY ALTERNATIVE?

- All forms of agriculture make an important contribution to Queensland economy
- Queensland has the highest organic value of farm gate sales (\$139 million) and the largest area of certified organic
- Horticulture is the largest sector of the organic industry in Queensland, followed by meat and livestock, value-added products and grains and pulses (Benjamin, Huggins & Paynter, 2004)



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

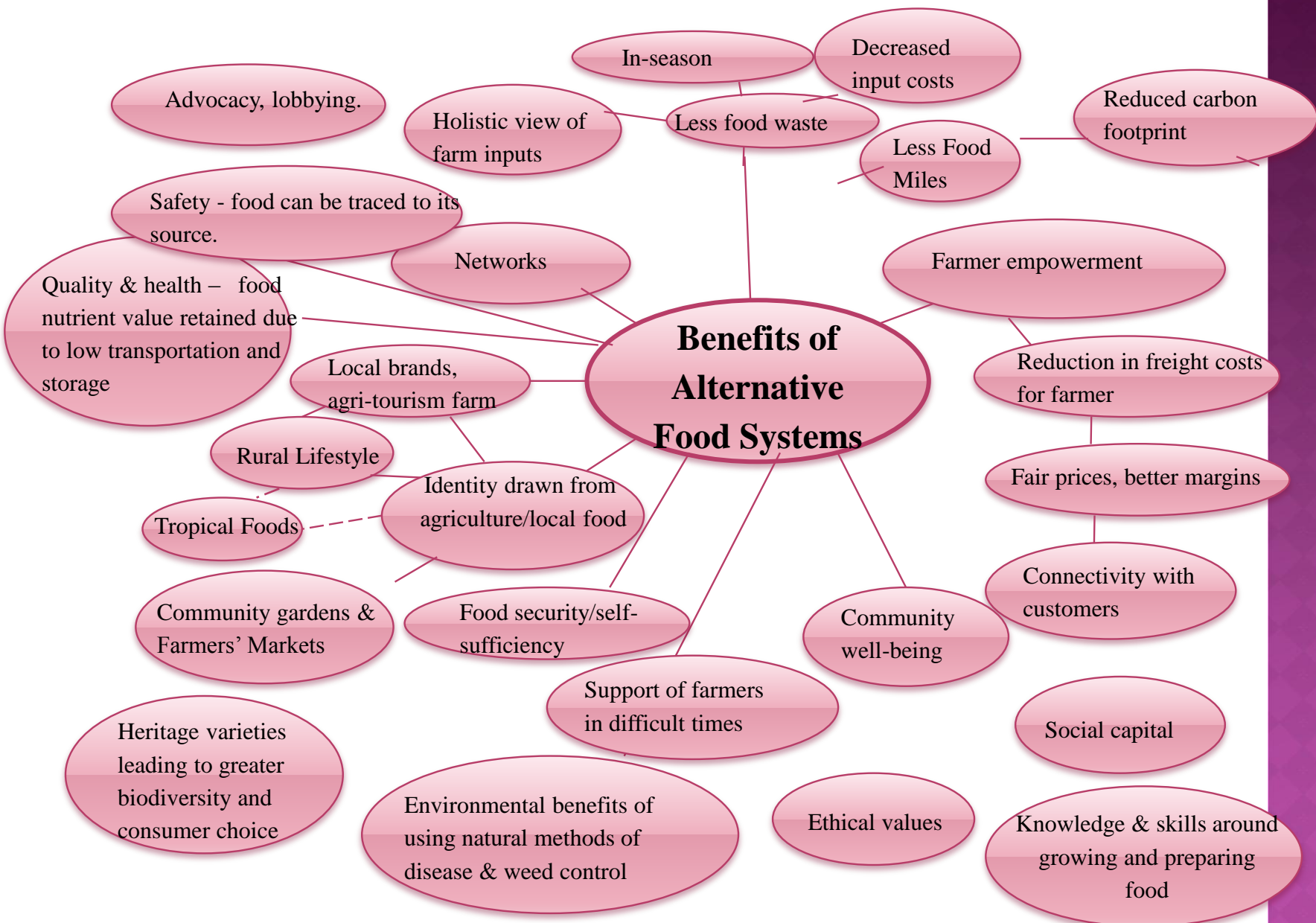
- Profile rise of alternative food systems in Northern Queensland (Tablelands, Cairns, Townsville)
- Evaluate attitudes of consumers, community leaders and producers towards alternative food systems and perceptions of their contribution to community well-being and local economic development
- Examine barriers to development

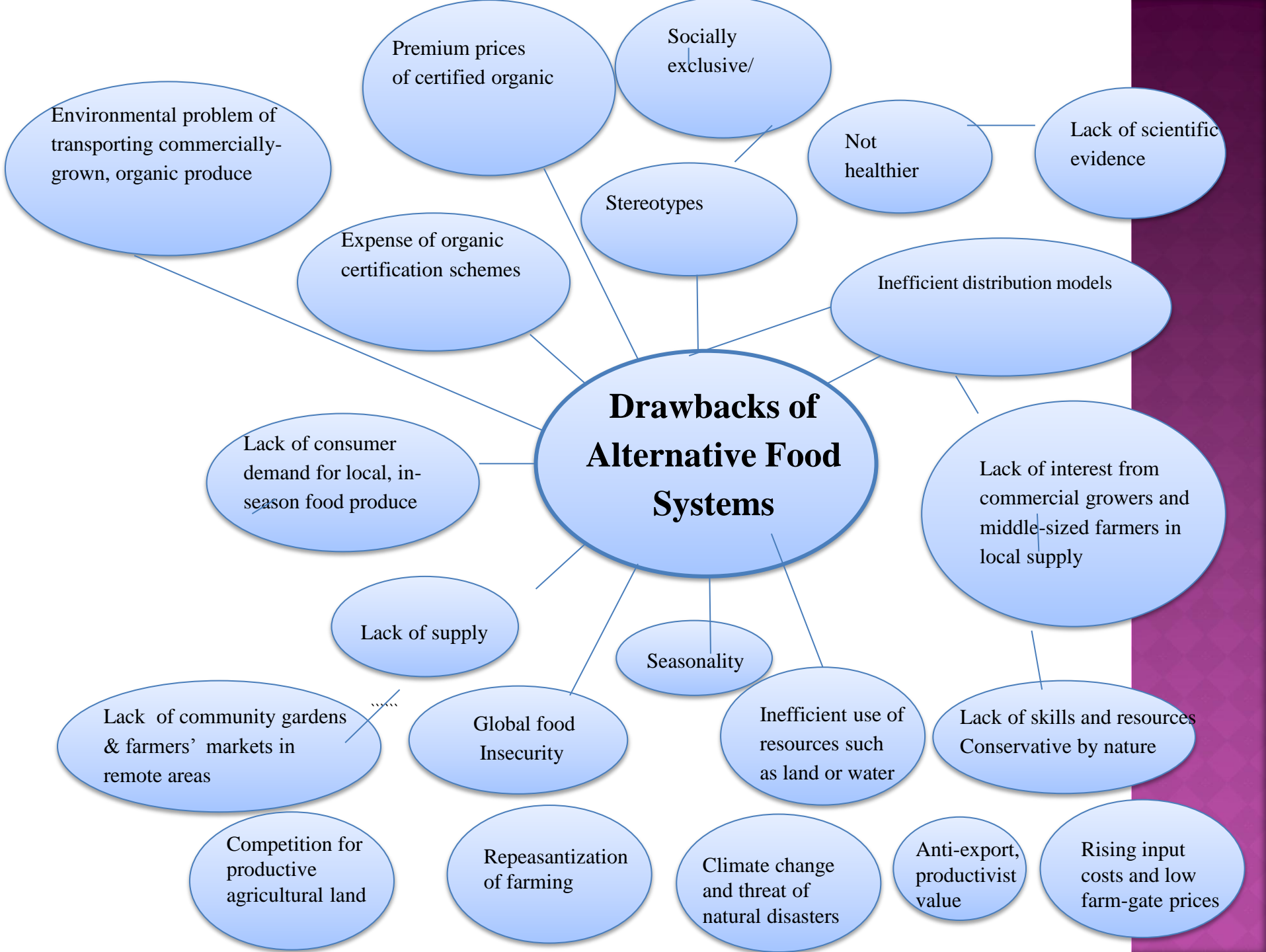
METHODOLOGY - MIXED METHODS, LONGITUDINAL

1. Consumer Survey - 139 consumers
2. Key Informant Interviews - 10
3. Participant Observation - 6 documented meetings of a local *Food for Thought* network since its foundation in 2008 to current year
4. Secondary data - extant literature review, websites, policy documents, community plans (7).



DATA FINDINGS





CONCLUSIONS

- Key benefits of community-based food production in Northern Queensland include:
 - reduction of food miles,
 - improved access to high quality, fresh food,
 - development of social networks and resilient communities
- Actors have embraced self-help solutions in an unforgiving environment
- The development of alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) will depend on tackling barriers:
 - lack of supply
 - attracting larger, commercial growers into local food supply network
 - consumer attitudes towards seasonality of production



Wackernagel, M. and William E. Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*. New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, 1996.

POTENTIAL WAYS OF SUPPORTING ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS?



- ◉ Support local food initiatives and gather indicators of local food production
- ◉ Promote public sector, local food procurement policies
- ◉ Network building and expansion
- ◉ Integrate food policy and regional planning; create stronger organisational links between various state government departments responsible for health, food, primary industries and regional development
- ◉ Public marketing campaigns and involve Queensland producers by promoting them in the campaigns.
- ◉ Investigate the development of a Queensland “local food” mark or logo to support agri-tourism and allow consumers to support locally grown producers.
- ◉ Protect fertile agricultural land through exclusive, non-contestable zoning of land