Dr Breda McCarthy

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Challenge 5: How Might we Best Develop Northern Australia?
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
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 Out 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
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 to 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).
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)
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
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).
Benefits of Alternative Food Systems

- Environmental benefits of using natural methods of disease & weed control
- Farmer empowerment
- Reduction in freight costs for farmer
- Fair prices, better margins
- Connectivity with customers
- Social capital
- Knowledge & skills around growing and preparing food
- Quality & health – food nutrient value retained due to low transportation and storage
- Safety – food can be traced to its source.
- Holistic view of farm inputs
- Networks
- Local brands, agri-tourism farm
- Rural Lifestyle
- Tropical Foods
- Community gardens & Farmers’ Markets
- Heritage varieties leading to greater biodiversity and consumer choice
- Identity drawn from agriculture/local food
- Food security/self-sufficiency
- Community well-being
- Support of farmers in difficult times
- Ethical values
- In-season
- Decreased input costs
- Less Food Miles
- Reduced carbon footprint
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Drawbacks of Alternative Food Systems

- Environmental problem of transporting commercially-grown, organic produce
- Expense of organic certification schemes
- Premium prices of certified organic
- Inefficient distribution models
- Not healthier
- Stereotypes
- Inefficient use of resources such as land or water
- Lack of scientific evidence
- Lack of interest from commercial growers and middle-sized farmers in local supply
- Seasonality
- Global food insecurity
- Lack of consumer demand for local, in-season food produce
- Lack of supply
- Lack of community gardens & farmers’ markets in remote areas
- Climate change and threat of natural disasters
- Repeasantization of farming
- Anti-export, productivist value
- Rising input costs and low farm-gate prices
- Lack of skills and resources
- Conservative by nature
- Competition for productive agricultural land
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
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