

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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National Food Plan

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the Economy

National Plan

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Report Highlights:

The Australian Government has released the first ever National Food Plan which outlines policies and investment strategies to support food production, domestic supply and promotion of food exports for Australia.

Australian National Food Plan

On May 25th the Australian Minister for Agriculture, Joe Ludwig released the first National Food Plan ('the Plan') for Australia. Development of the Plan began in 2010 and has progressed from an Issues paper in 2011 through extensive industry and community consultation to a final plan in 2013. The final version lists four priority areas: increasing exports of agricultural commodities and expertise, investing in research, development and workforce training, ensuring Australians have access to safe, nutritious food and maintaining environmental sustainability of food production. These priorities reflect broader objectives set out in the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*. Under these priorities 16 specific goals to be reached by 2025 have been established. The Plan also proposes establishment of an Australian Council of Food to assist in implementation of the Plan and provide long term strategic planning advice. The Plan is to be reviewed every five years along with a State of the Food System report to analyze trends and ensure goals are met.

Trade and market access

Goals:

- Increasing the value of agriculture and food exports by 45 percent
- Improved trade and investment relationships in the Asia-Pacific region
- Australia to have a globally recognized food brand

To meet these goals \$28.5¹ million is to be invested in the Asian Food Markets Research Fund to increase exports to Asian markets. This includes \$2.2 million for research into food industry trends. A further \$5.6 million will be spent on building relationships with trading partners which includes expanding the network of agricultural specialists which support agricultural trade in Asia. \$2 million has been allocated to development of Australian food branding.

At the same time the United States in reducing expenditure on international marketing of agricultural exports and promotion of US trade interests has been affected by budget reduction measures. These trends may reduce the relative competitiveness of US agricultural products in the future, particularly in the growing Asian market.

Agricultural productivity

Goals:

- Increase agricultural productivity by 30 percent
- Increase innovation in food manufacturing
- Increase the number of workers in agriculture and fisheries with post-school qualifications
- Improve infrastructure and biosecurity systems
- Increase participation in the digital economy

¹ All figures are in Australian dollars. As at May 28, 2013 \$AU1 = \$US0.96

- Australia will be in the top five most efficiently regulated countries in the world

During the consultation period for the National Food Plan regulation and 'red tape' were identified as one of the major impediments to agricultural business productivity and the Australian National Farmers Federation also highlighted red-tape as a key issue in their 'Blueprint for Australian Agriculture' released in February 2013. As a result the Australian Productivity Commission has committed to conducting a review of the cumulative impact of regulations affecting agriculture in 2014-15.

Expectations that these improvements will be made are mixed but likely to increase if the Australian Liberal-National Party coalition wins government in the Federal Election to be held on September 14th, 2013. Under the current Labor government recent changes to agricultural chemical regulations are actually expected to impose greater restrictions on farmers. Conversely on May 22nd, 2013 the Liberal state government in Queensland made significant changes to vegetation management laws which have been hailed as a significant improvement in reducing regulatory impediments to agricultural development. The newly re-elected Liberal Government in Western Australia has also committed to reducing red tape and at the federal level a large part of the Opposition Treasurer's budget reply, speech on May 23rd, 2013 focused on reducing red tape, particularly for small businesses.

Investment commitments specific to meeting these goals include:

- establishing a Food Industry Innovation Precinct
- \$23 million for food related research
- workforce assessments of the food industry supply chain
- \$5.8 billion for the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program
- \$8.5 million for the Northern Australia Sustainable Futures Program
- \$10 million for the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy
- \$1.5 million to develop resources and skills for teaching about food and agriculture

The Liberal-National Party has a strong commitment to investment in agriculture, particularly in North Queensland therefore these investment are likely to remain and may even be increased under a change of government.

People

Goals:

- Australia to be considered in the top three countries for food safety
- Develop a National Nutrition Policy
- Improve information on food labeling including addressing country of origin labeling issues
- Provide Australian children with a better understanding of how food is produced

A major component of these goals will be the National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health. This program will have a total investment of \$932 million over nine years including \$87 million for chronic disease management and prevention in indigenous communities. \$18.2 million will also be spent expanding the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program to 650 schools by 2015. A further \$1.5 million will be invested in support for community gardens and farmers markets.

Sustainable food

Goals:

- Australia will produce food sustainably
- Australia will have reduced per capita food waste.

There is no new specific funding allocated by the National Food Plan to achieve these objectives, rather they will be achieved by other government programs such as the Caring for our Country Sustainable Agriculture Stream and the Carbon Farming Futures program.

Industry Response

The Australian National Farmers Federation has broadly praised the National Food Plan but had requested \$5 million for agricultural education in schools rather than the \$1.5 million which was provided.

Concerns have been raised by the Australian Greens Party which argued that the Plan does not address issues of supermarket duopoly, place enough emphasis on dealing with climate change or sufficiently tighten food labeling laws. The Greens introduced a bill to the Australian Parliament in May 2013 to require food to be labeled based on where it was grown or produced rather than where it was packaged or processed. The challenge associated with this proposal is how to handle products such as canned fruit and vegetables which may be grown in multiple countries before being packaged or processed in Australia. The Bill has been passed by the Senate but will need to pass the House of Representatives without amendment before it becomes legislation.

The Australian Conservation Foundation has also expressed concerns about the ecological impact of developing more intensive agriculture in northern Australia as outlined in the Plan.

Full details of the Plan can be found [here](#).