



QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION



National Food Security Strategy: discussion paper **September 2025**

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Prepared for
Hon. Julie Collins
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry of Australia
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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This submission is provided to:

Hon. Julie Collins MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry of Australia
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Submitted via haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/food-security-strategy

Our members

- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Cotton Australia
- Canegrowers
- Greenlife Industry QLD
- eastAUSmilk
- Australian Cane Farmers Association
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Australian Chicken Meat Federation
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallowa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

Our members are agricultural peak bodies who collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers who produce food, fibre and foliage across the state.

QFF's peak body members come together to develop policy and lead projects on the key issues that are important to their farmer members and the Queensland agriculture sector.

Together, we form a strong, unified voice leveraging our effectiveness by working together to drive policy and initiatives that support a strong future for Queensland agriculture.

Submission

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the **National Food Security Strategy: discussion paper**.

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Introduction

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of *Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Strategy*.

Australia's food system is productive and innovative, yet it faces a convergence of pressures that threaten both household access to affordable, nutritious food and the future viability of our agricultural sector. Rising input costs, concentrated retail markets, and uneven geographic access mean many Australians struggle to access affordable, fresh food and support consistent, nutritious diets. In Queensland alone, nearly 700,000 households, roughly one in three, experienced food insecurity last year, with one in five reporting severe impacts such as skipping meals or reducing portions.

Those consumer-facing problems reflect pressures throughout the supply chain. Australia's productive base faces loss of prime farmland to urban expansion, mining, environmental and offset pursuits and other competing land uses, ongoing reliance on imported inputs (fuel, fertilisers and agrochemicals), workforce shortages, climate volatility and global supply-chain risks. These combined pressures increase the likelihood of sudden shocks that threaten both future farm viability and food availability and affordability for consumers.

Food security therefore has multiple, interconnected purposes: securing consumer access to nutritious food; underpinning regional and national economies; supporting social cohesion; and contributing to sovereign resilience by maintaining a distributed, productive population and resilient regions. A successful national strategy must reflect all of those purposes, not treat them in isolation.

Sustainable food security begins on the farm. Without profitable and resilient agriculture, downstream interventions in transport, retail, or distribution cannot guarantee consistent access to nutritious food. Queensland's broad and diverse production system, from tropical horticulture to grazing, cropping, sugar and aquaculture, is a national asset but also exposes

the system to unique regional risks: extreme weather, geographic isolation and logistical vulnerabilities that can amplify costs and interruptions.

A National Food Security Strategy should therefore embed sustainability and resilience at its core: treat agriculture as a strategic national asset, safeguard the natural resources that underpin production, and tailor actions to Australia's diverse regions. By prioritising farm viability and resilience alongside consumer outcomes, the Strategy can strengthen food-system sustainability and deliver equitable, enduring benefits for communities, consumers and the nation. We must value food production.

Summary of key points

QFF advocates for a national food strategy that positions production at the centre of national security planning, but only where it is underpinned by practical environmental standards, fair market settings, and targeted investment to ensure benefits are sustained and equitably distributed. QFF recommends the following priority actions.

1. Define purpose and vision. Establish a national vision for a resilient, productive and sustainable food system that delivers affordable, nutritious food for all Australians. The Strategy must set explicit targets across short, medium and long-term horizons, link them to national security, domestic nutrition, and regional prosperity, and mandate transparent public reporting.
2. Recognise food and farm as critical infrastructure. Establish agriculture and its enablers, land, water, workforce, energy, and logistics, as critical national priorities. Require contingency planning for energy and fuel shocks and incentivise on-farm energy resilience through storage systems, microgrids and bioenergy.
3. Partnerships and biosecurity. Embed shared responsibility not just across producers, but with a whole of government, industry, and community approach. Ensure sustained investment in biosecurity (prevention, early detection, rapid response, and on-farm capability upgrades) to protect domestic supply and export markets while supporting farm viability, supply chain resilience, and community stability.
4. Prioritise AgTech and R&D. Allocate targeted funding for farmer-led, demand-driven R&D in AgTech, crop science and data-driven risk management. Expand regional innovation hubs and ensure SMEs have equitable access to new technologies through adoption incentives and scaled extension services. Drive a more effective approach to R&D through increased collaboration between the various research institutions to minimise current duplication, bureaucracy and inefficiencies ensuring research dollars go further and work more closely with industry priorities.
5. Protect productive land and resources. Enact statutory safeguards to secure high-value farmland and water resources. Prohibit rezoning of prime agricultural land for incompatible uses, including urban expansion, environmental and offset pursuits that result in large areas of agricultural land locked up, mining and infrastructure, by embedding clear "no-go" zones in planning systems or at the very least, strongly incentivising agriculture as the priority land use in key regions. Increase transparency in environmental and offset pursuits providing clearer oversight of the resulting land use changes.

6. Ensure regional equity and place-based planning. Deliver targeted freight subsidies, processing investments and market access support to northern, western and remote supply chains. Mandate place-based planning frameworks to ensure food security outcomes reflect Australia's geographic and climatic diversity. Provide direct support assist farmers build their preparedness and adaptation capacity to increase their resilience when it comes to managing weather risks.
7. Embrace co-benefits and circularity. Introduce incentives for regenerative practices, waste-to-value projects, and nutrient and energy recovery systems. Fund industrial symbiosis hubs in regional centres to convert crop residues and by-products into fertiliser, energy and other inputs.
8. Embed regenerative agriculture and climate-smart cropping. Make regenerative agriculture and climate-smart crop R&D explicit national priorities. Fund programs that improve soil health as a fundamental to achieving biodiversity and carbon sequestration but coupled with increased production and profitability for agricultural production.

Response to questions for discussion

Question 1. Principles

What other principles should government, industry, and community prioritise to support the development of the strategy and why are these important?

The Discussion Paper suggests four principles: whole-of-food-system, collaborative, ambitious and forward-looking, and outcomes-based and practical. While these provide a useful foundation, additional principles are required to ensure the Strategy delivers tangible, enduring outcomes. QFF offers the following recommendations:

1. Accountability and transparency

Previous agricultural and food-related strategies have failed due to limited measurability or lack of enforcement. Food security must be recognised as a shared responsibility across producers, governments, industry, communities, and consumers. A successful Strategy depends on partnerships that link farm gate to plate, underpinned by measurable, transparent outcomes and regular public reporting. Metrics should extend beyond economic indicators to include regional food access, supply chain resilience during shocks, farm business profitability, farmland retention, waste reduction, and nutritional improvements. Embedding accountability ensures the Strategy remains operational, driving demonstrable progress rather than remaining a static policy document.

2. Food and farm as critical infrastructure

Food security must be recognised and treated as critical national infrastructure, equivalent to energy, defence, and health systems. A secure food system underpins national stability, and the consistent availability and accessibility of food must be safeguarded in long-term planning and investment frameworks. Agricultural land, water, energy, production systems, and biosecurity must be safeguarded as foundational enablers. Building resilience requires redundancy, alternative supply routes, back-up laboratories, secure access to essential inputs, and contingency infrastructure, so that shocks such as biosecurity incursions, natural disasters, or infrastructure failure do not cascade into systemic food insecurity.

3. *Partnerships and biosecurity (shared viability and responsibility)*

The Strategy must embed shared responsibility across the food system, recognising that food security relies on partnerships between producers, governments, industry, communities, and consumers. Profitable and resilient farm businesses depend on supportive policies, investments, and collaborations that link farm gate to plate, while biosecurity is explicitly recognised as a first-order national security issue. Sustained investment in prevention, early detection, rapid response, and on-farm capability upgrades is essential to protect both domestic supply and export markets. Food security underpins nutrition, regional economies, social cohesion, and national resilience, and placing partnerships at the centre requires measurable indicators across farm viability, workforce capacity, supply chain strength, affordability, and community stability.

4. *Regional equity and place-based design*

Regional equity and place-based planning must be core principles. National-level measures of food security mask significant regional disparities, particularly in northern, remote, and First Nations communities where supply chains are fragile, food access is limited, and prices are significantly higher than in metropolitan areas. A genuinely national strategy must reflect Australia's geographic and climatic diversity, recognising that resilience in one region cannot offset insecurity in another. Place-based solutions, co-designed with regional communities, are essential to address infrastructure, workforce, and production system needs and could unlock regional food supply opportunities to be leveraged and strengthened. National programs must also be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the distinct requirements of tropical horticulture, intensive livestock, broadacre cropping, and aquaculture.

5. *Intergenerational renewal and agency*

Intergenerational renewal is not solely a workforce issue but a food security imperative. Without deliberate investment in younger farmers and secure pathways to farmland, Australia risks eroding continuity of production knowledge, land stewardship, and farm succession. Protecting agricultural land is therefore essential, not only for productivity but also to enable intergenerational renewal and ensure continuity in food production capacity.

Question 2. Timeframes

What timeframe should the strategy work towards: short (1 to 2 years), medium (5 to 10 years) or long (10-plus years) term, and why?

Food security is a long-term challenge that nonetheless requires urgent, sequenced action. QFF recommends a tiered approach that combines immediate relief with medium-term capacity building and long-term system reform. Each phase should be underpinned by clear milestones, measurable outcomes, and transparent reporting.

- **Short term.** The Strategy must halt erosion of the productive base and protect household food access. Priorities must include relief for vulnerable supply chains, energy and water tariff reform, workforce solutions, rapid but sustained biosecurity resourcing with surge capacity (recognising biosecurity is both an immediate and enduring requirement, not a task that can be “finished” within 1–2 years), stronger disaster preparedness, and urgent planning to protect high-value farmland. These actions reduce acute risk, keep farms operating, and prevent supply shocks.

- Medium term. Invest in structural enablers that strengthen productivity and resilience. Priorities include improving irrigation efficiency and water infrastructure, scaling renewable energy with storage, enhancing digital connectivity and extension, and upgrading regional transport, processing, and cold-chain capacity. This is also the time to foster intergenerational renewal through training, land and finance access, and planning reform to protect farmland. Tangible outcomes should include regional processing hubs, cold-chain investments, and farmer-led innovation projects brought to scale.
- Long term. Secure food security within national governance and infrastructure systems. Key objectives are maintaining world-class biosecurity and antimicrobial resistance surveillance over the long term, positioning Australia as a leader in climate-smart and nutrition-focused production, embedding circular-economy practices, and ensuring regulation supports innovation while protecting the environment. Agricultural land must be recognised and safeguarded as a strategic national asset. To ensure continuity across electoral cycles, QFF recommends establishing a permanent institutional home or cross-agency taskforce for food security, backed by a long-term mandate, secure funding, and independent review.

Question 3. Programs

Are there examples of current or planned initiatives by you or your organisation to improve food security in your sector?

QFF and its member organisations are delivering initiatives that directly contribute to strengthening Australia's food security by enhancing the capacity, resilience, and productivity of the food system. Our key programs/initiatives include:

- Workforce development. Through [SmartAg Queensland](#), QFF equips farmers and agribusinesses with the skills required to adopt advanced technologies, optimise production systems, and meet the demands of a rapidly evolving sector. By supporting accredited and micro-credential training, SmartAg ensures a digitally capable and adaptable workforce, reinforcing both immediate productivity gains and long-term intergenerational renewal.
- Disaster preparedness and resilience. QFF also delivers the [Farm Business Resilience Program](#) (FBRP), which supports producers to strengthen disaster preparedness and adapt to climate variability. By embedding resilience planning at the enterprise level, the program enables farmers to identify risks, implement strategies, and secure continuity of production during shocks.
- Biosecurity leadership. QFF works in partnership with government and industry to enhance prevention, early detection, and rapid response to pest and disease threats. Initiatives such as the *Intensive Animal Industries Roadmap 2025–2035* ensure growth in production occurs alongside the maintenance of high standards for food safety and environmental sustainability, thereby protecting both domestic supply and export markets. QFF are partnering with Biosecurity Queensland to commence a Biosecurity in the Boardroom initiative aimed at raising awareness and engaging businesses and industry outside of the agricultural industry to understand the risk biosecurity poses to their business and actions they can take to contribute to stronger biosecurity protections nationally.

- Water and energy efficiency. Water and energy are treated as strategic enablers of food production within QFF initiatives. Through programs in irrigation and energy efficiency, distributed renewable energy generation, and microgrid pilots, farmers are reducing input costs, improving resource-use efficiency, and building resilience to drought and energy volatility. There are a number of policy and infrastructure barriers that need to be addressed, if these opportunities are to be fully realised.
- Land-use planning and protection. QFF actively advocates for land-use governance and statutory protections to preserve farmland as a permanent and legitimate use. By embedding agriculture into regional planning and coexistence frameworks, QFF helps ensure that productive land is not displaced by competing demands such as mining, energy projects, environmental and offset pursuits, or urban expansion. There is an urgent need for increased transparency and the ability to map changes to land use across regions, states and the nation to inform effective land use policy.

Question 4. Priority areas

Do the proposed key priority areas and whole of system considerations adequately represent the actions needed for an effective food security strategy? If not, what is missing?

The Discussion Paper's three priority areas, resilient supply chains, productivity and innovation, and competition and cost of living, address important dimensions of food security. However, they are not sufficient on their own. QFF strongly asserts that several critical enablers are either missing or underemphasised and must be explicitly prioritised to deliver a secure food system.

- Geopolitical resilience and critical inputs. Mandate diversification of supply chains for fertilisers, machinery components and stockfeed. Establish domestic stockpiles of essential inputs and embed critical trade relationships within national security planning to mitigate risks from geopolitical disruption.
- Land-use governance and protection of productive land. Enact statutory safeguards to protect high-value farmland from conversion to mining, environmental and offset pursuits that result in large areas of agricultural land locked up, renewable energy, urban expansion and incompatible infrastructure. Integrate farmland protection into national land-use planning frameworks as a non-negotiable strategic priority. Develop strategies that support layering opportunities when it comes to land use and strive to ensure optimal land use and the avoidance of unproductive landscapes that bring unintended consequences and negative impacts on food security, biosecurity and land management risk and a viable future for agriculture and regional communities.
- Workforce and intergenerational renewal. Fund structured pathways to secure the next generation of farmers, including access to land, finance and markets. Make digital skills training and workforce development mandatory pillars of food security policy, ensuring producers are equipped for AgTech adoption and climate-smart production.
- Biosecurity as a core pillar. Establish biosecurity as a central element of food security. Scale national investment in prevention, surveillance and diagnostics, expand emergency response capacity, and provide direct support for on-farm biosecurity upgrades. Position biosecurity as a first-order national security issue, not a peripheral

compliance task. It is critical that we drive a whole of government, whole of industry, whole of community approach to shared responsibility and shared delivery if we are to successfully meet the increasing biosecurity risks expected ahead.

- Supply chain fundamentals. Guarantee secure access to land and water, streamline approvals for essential infrastructure, and invest in reliable transport, processing and energy networks. Require redundancy across transport routes, machinery, and processing facilities to avoid systemic collapse during shocks. Prioritise key supply chain inputs that support food security.
- Strategic enablers. Elevate biosecurity, water security and energy affordability as the three non-negotiable foundations of national food security. Fund efficient irrigation systems, regionalised infrastructure, and renewable energy adoption as strategic priorities to protect production, processing and transport continuity.

Question 5. Actions

What actions could the strategy take to address challenges under each key priority area?

The Discussion Paper identifies three key priorities, resilient supply chains; productivity, innovation, and economic growth; and competition and cost of living, supported by five whole-of-system considerations. Below are concrete, policy-ready actions aligned to the Discussion Paper's priorities.

Resilient supply chains

Supply chain resilience is foundational to food security. While Australia's food system has demonstrated strength during crises such as COVID-19 and natural disasters, vulnerabilities remain, particularly in regional and remote communities where disruptions lead to prolonged shortages and inflated prices.

- Invest in freight corridors, cold storage, and digital connectivity, with agricultural routes formally designated as national security priorities.
- Establish and maintain alternative transport corridors to mitigate natural disasters, biosecurity incidents, and regional isolation.
- Protective measures must be implemented to manage risks from animal activism and threats, including water or food contamination, which often originate from well-funded overseas groups.
- Strategic reserves of essential inputs such as fertilisers, fuel, and water allocations should be established to reduce exposure to global supply shocks. Genetic resources and seed stock protection must also be considered critical to supply chain resilience.
- Regional processing and storage capacity must be expanded to avoid over-reliance on "just-in-time" models. Co-investment in abattoirs, packing facilities, and grain storage would retain value in regions and reduce vulnerability.
- Land-use planning reforms are essential to ensure that agricultural land is not displaced by mining, renewables, poorly planned environmental and offset pursuits, or urban development. A coherent national land-use strategy must recognise agriculture as a permanent and legitimate use, embedded within coexistence frameworks.

- Mandate digital traceability pilots and interoperable data standards to improve transparency and speed of response across critical supply chains.

Productivity, innovation, and economic growth

Productivity determines both the availability and affordability of food. Yet farm profitability is under pressure from rising input costs, climate variability, and biosecurity threats.

- Expand regional innovation hubs, farmer-led demonstration farms, and public–private partnerships to accelerate technology adoption. Ensure R&D is demand-driven and place-based.
- Land-use security must be treated as a direct productivity action: efficiency gains are meaningless if farmland is lost to competing uses.
- Productivity initiatives must integrate climate adaptation, diversification, and biosecurity readiness to ensure sustainability and ultimately, the profitability of farming enterprises.
- Intergenerational renewal must be supported through pathways that provide young farmers with fair access to land, finance, and knowledge transfer.
- Fund breeding programs and R&D into diversified and alternative crops to enhance resilience to climate variability, pests, and diseases, while improving nutrition security and consumer choice.
- Support public-private partnerships for precision-agriculture deployment at scale, and fund demonstration farms that prioritise small and medium-sized enterprises.

Competition and cost of living

Food security is not only about supply but also affordability. Rising costs, concentrated retail markets, and global disruptions have exacerbated the “cost-price squeeze” for producers while increasing consumer prices.

- Stronger regulation of supermarket conduct is required to address monopsony power, ensure fair farm-gate returns, and protect consumers from inflated retail margins. Market concentration risks must be regularly assessed, with policies implemented to mitigate leverage by dominant suppliers or retailers.
- Regional processing and cooperative models should be expanded to localise supply chains, reduce transport costs, and retain economic value in rural areas.
- Circular economy initiatives, including waste-to-value solutions such as converting sugarcane and cotton by-products into bioenergy or fertiliser, must be scaled to lower input costs, reduce waste, and improve efficiency.
- National efforts to reduce food waste through improved storage, logistics, secondary markets and redistribution would simultaneously improve affordability, reduce costs, and strengthen resilience.
- Consider regulatory and tax settings that support farmer cooperatives, social enterprises, and community food hubs to improve local affordability and further market opportunities for food producers.

- Develop and deliver a deep, long term campaign that ensures all Australians are more aware of our food systems, more discerning as to where their food comes from and their purchasing decisions, an understanding of the broader contribution agriculture makes to regional communities, land management and environmental outcomes, and achieves an overall uplift in how Australians value farmers and food.

Question 6. Whole-of-system considerations

What actions could the strategy take to address challenges under these whole-of-system considerations?

The Strategy must adopt a unifying risk-assessment framework to prioritise interventions where vulnerabilities are greatest. For each whole-of-system area, QFF recommends the following targeted policy actions:

- **Climate resilience.** Adaptation must be treated as an economic and food security imperative, not only an environmental concern. National policy should require integration of climate adaptation planning across all production systems, with measurable targets for drought, heat, and flood preparedness.
- **Climate-resilient crops and regenerative agriculture.** Long-term public investment in R&D is needed to develop drought-tolerant, heat-resilient, and water-efficient crop varieties, with extension programs to ensure rapid uptake. Regenerative agriculture should be embedded as a national framework priority, supporting soil restoration, carbon sequestration, and reduced chemical dependency while safeguarding long-term productive capacity and profitability for farming enterprises.
- **Workforce and succession.** A secure food system requires structured investment in workforce renewal. Establishing regional training hubs, national digital skills programs, and succession pathways will equip producers for AgTech adoption and climate-smart practices while ensuring intergenerational continuity. Support industry led initiatives that have a proven delivery outcomes on the ground.
- **Nutrition equity.** National food security must include equitable access to affordable, nutritious food, particularly in remote, regional, and First Nations communities. Subsidies, freight support, and community-led models are needed to close affordability and accessibility gaps.
- **Crop diversification R&D.** Expanding research into diversified, nutrient-dense crops will build both resilience and consumer health outcomes. Linking crop diversification to soil health, nutrient density, and dietary quality will strengthen farm viability while addressing household nutrition. Streamline current R&D capacity driving improved cooperation between key entities.
- **Trade and market access.** Trade policy must explicitly balance export competitiveness with the stability of domestic supply. Safeguards for key staple foods are essential to protect national resilience from global market volatility. Protections of Australia's biosecurity framework must be adhered to and considered a non-negotiable when it comes to international trade.

- Critical infrastructure. Farmland, water, and energy must be formally recognised as strategic national infrastructure. Statutory protections for high-value agricultural land should be embedded in planning frameworks to prevent irreversible loss to competing uses. Consider incentives that will drive optimal land use and support future food security. Urgently drive the capacity to understand and measure current land use and the changes taking place so that land use policy is effectively informed.
- System-wide risk management. Comprehensive monitoring and early-warning systems are required to anticipate and mitigate systemic threats, from climate shocks to supply chain disruption. These mechanisms should be mandated and linked to transparent reporting.
- Biosecurity and health integration. Biosecurity must be positioned as a core pillar of food security. Expanding resistance surveillance and integrating veterinary and public-health data systems will strengthen national capacity to manage zoonotic and foodborne risks.

Conclusion

Australia has a world-class food system, but food security cannot be taken for granted, and we do so at our peril. Complacency in the face of emerging challenges, including climate volatility, biosecurity threats, rising household food costs, and the permanent loss of productive farmland, risks undermining both consumer access to affordable, fresh food and farm viability.

The Strategy must seek to embed strong, systemic enablers, including water, energy, land-use governance, biosecurity, and a skilled, adaptable workforce. These enablers are essential to safeguard productive capacity, resilience, and innovation across Australia's diverse agricultural sectors. Regional equity, intergenerational renewal, and measurable outcomes should guide implementation, ensuring that progress is transparent, inclusive, and sustainable.

By treating agriculture as critical infrastructure, protecting farmland, and adopting a phased, tiered approach to implementation, the National Food Security Strategy can secure Australia's food future. Done right, it will strengthen farm viability, enhance system resilience, and deliver equitable, sustainable benefits for communities, consumers, and the nation as a whole.

We must value farmers and ensure a profitable future for the agricultural sector, if we are to have any chance of building resilience in our food systems. Food security must be prioritised and is fundamental in building Australia's national security.

Yours sincerely

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