

Chapter 8

Hungry for Change: The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance

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8.1 Introduction

The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance is one of a growing number of nascent food movements in Australia to have emerged out of concern for the country's food future, as well as the deleterious effect the present food system is having on its citizens' health and the continent's fragile environment (Coveney 2000; Lockie et al. 2002). Until recently, food security has been perceived as a matter of concern for developing countries but not for Australia, which is generally seen as a country in which food is plentiful (Edwards and Mercer 2010) and which is a major food exporter to the rest of the world (Ingram et al. 2010).

The formation of the Alliance in 2005 preceded the current surge of public interest in the food system, particularly since 2007, which can be attributed to concerns about the global food crises, the effect of climate change and peak oil on food production, the recent drought, the loss of agricultural land due to urbanization as well as mining (Mason and Knowd 2010; Merson et al. 2010), together with a consumer-led desire for fresh local food and gourmet foods, and fears about food security among some sections of the community. Approximately one million Australians (about 5% of the population) are "food insecure" at an individual, or household level, meaning that at some stage they have run out of food and are unable to buy more (Nolan et al. 2006). In addition, there is considerable apprehension about rising levels of obesity, with its deleterious effects on health and a precursor of prevalent chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular problems (Friel 2010). There is less overt recognition that obesity

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disproportionately affects those on low incomes. Food security is no longer viewed as solely a difficulty faced by other less-developed countries; it is being recognized as an Australia-wide problem with the potential to affect everyone's life, from the level of household sustenance to national food resilience. Australia is not as food secure as many would claim (Dixon et al. 2011).

Food security as a human right lies at the heart of the Alliance's philosophy, and equitable and sustainable food policies for New South Wales are a core focus of its advocacy. Many food-related new social movements (NSMs) have a single or narrow focus, such as specific food production methods (permaculture, organics), food manufacturing and processing (such as the debate on genetically modified foods; sugars, additives, and preservatives in processed foods), the rights of animals, and health (obesity), for example. The Alliance arguably occupies a distinctive niche among these organizations and individuals taking action on food security in Australia for two principal reasons; first, it is an eclectic alliance of individuals and organizations, private and public, many of whom hold contradictory views on food security, the food system, what needs to change, how and by whom; second, it operates in a specific, geographically defined urban/peri-urban space (Sydney). It attempts a whole-of-food-system synergy by providing a forum for all stakeholders to coalesce and network through a single entity. According to a key alliance member:

We have come up with an idea whose time has come [but] we now need to move beyond the rhetoric to implementation, not only on a local scale as demonstrated by individual small projects, but at a broader level by effectively addressing issues such as urban planning. There are wide gaps in the food system.

The Alliance's structure and activities clearly position it as an NSM. It is engaged in collective action on a specific issue, in this instance, food security/justice, and operates outside the political sphere while aiming to influence and affect societal change (Larana et al. 1994; Wright and Middendorf 2007). It seeks a socially just and equitable food system for NSW, through food policies shaped by a consultative, bottom-up, stakeholder-driven process, acknowledging that "trust and cooperation are now crucial considerations in the development of public policy" (Coveney 2000 p. S98). However, the Alliance, like other food justice movements, can struggle to make its voice heard and effect change in a system that is largely apathetic, possibly due to a general lack of knowledge.

Its membership is very diverse reflecting the range of interests it envisages will influence and shape state food policies. In 2011, there were more than 200 individual and group members, representing a wide range of stakeholders in the food system: primary producers, farmer networks, community gardeners, academics, and professionals working in a wide range of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, with an interest in broad issues such as environmental sustainability, urban and peri-urban food production, health and nutrition, welfare and social justice. While there are inevitable tensions, the membership sees this cross-sectoral approach as essential to effectively address the complexities of the current food system. But if the Alliance is a food movement, whose interest(s) does it represent?

Any organization claiming to represent a multitude of interests with a single voice runs the risk of being seen to, or actually, privileging the needs of one sector over another (Winson 2010). This is a challenge for the Alliance in seeking to represent such a diverse range of stakeholders. Some are more likely than others to be marginalized in organizations of this nature. Farmers, either through a sheer inability to leave their farm to attend meetings in the city; from a suspicion of activist groups, or the fact that many are from non-English speaking backgrounds, are less likely than other stakeholders to have a voice.

The Alliance has two principal stated objectives: “working towards food security and sustainable food systems” and “shaping food policies that are fair and sustainable”. This requires seeking meaningful and effective engagement with the political system at local, state, and federal government level. As the British food policy expert Tim Lang writes: “Food systems are the outcome of policy and political choices. Food is contested territory. There are conflicts of analysis and interest between diverse groups and sectors” (Lang 1999 p. 169). The Alliance aims to achieve “a mix of urban food strategies that try to do more than just ‘feed the city’ [Sydney]” (Sonnino 2009 p. 426). It strives to build capacity among smaller food producers and retailers; to foster the health benefits of a good diet, and to help make urban and peri-urban spaces more than the classical urban sprawl by retaining the productive agricultural land on the city’s fringes and promoting more food growing in the city.

Starting from the premise that the Alliance is a distinctive food movement in that it positions itself as an “umbrella” organization representing a wide range of stakeholders in the food system, this chapter reflects on the values, achievements, issues of concern, strengths and weaknesses, and future of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance. The information in this chapter is based on the meetings and events of the Alliance; on qualitative data collected by email survey responses to specific questions posed by the authors using email to all members of the Alliance’s list server, and on one-to-one interviews with key participants in the formation of the Alliance.

8.2 Food Security, Food Sovereignty, or Food Democracy?

Divergent interpretations of the contested term “food security” exist, and therein lies the danger of using the term in a generic sense without some definition. The Alliance’s definition of food security is: “When all people, at all times, have the ability to access and prepare sufficient, nutritious and affordable food necessary for an active and healthy life” (Sydney Food Fairness Alliance website). Food sovereignty is a more recent concept than food security, and similarly is a contested term. The term food sovereignty arose from the global agricultural peasant resistance movement, La Via Campesina. This movement, which focuses on “the social and economic conditions under which food ends up on the table” (Patel 2007 p. 90), was formed in 1993 to counter the hegemony of the global conventional food system and return power

and control to the food producers and consumers. Food sovereignty, in this context, is conceptualized as a “bottom-up” process.

The Canadian food activist Wayne Roberts argues that food security lies within the concept of food sovereignty: “When food is of, by and for the people then food security lies in food sovereignty” (Roberts 2008 p. 52). Roberts is arguing that food sovereignty lies in action, autonomy and control, with food security being just one outcome of that process. Others, such as Hassanein (2003), use “food democracy”, the key distinguishing characteristic being that “participation is a key feature of democracy” (Hassanein 2003 p. 79). He concurs with Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University London, whom he credits with conceptualizing and popularizing the term, that food democracy is more of a bottom-up process, involving full social engagement.

8.3 The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance: Beginnings and Evolution

Like many NSMs, the Alliance began with a simple conversation. In 2004, Gabriela Martinez from the Sydney South West Area Health Service’s (SSWAHS) “Running on Empty” food security program for low-income families in Villawood, western Sydney, contacted Jill Finnane of the social justice nongovernmental organization, the Edmund Rice Centre. They began exploring ways of working together on food security by linking social justice and environmental concerns, which were seen as “two sides of the coin” (Martinez 2011 pers. comm.).

Links were then established between the Edmund Rice Centre, SSWAHS’s Running on Empty program (2001–2004), and the Penrith Food Project, a multi-pronged strategy established in 1991 by Penrith City Council to improve food access in Penrith, in outer western Sydney (Reay and Webb 1998). The Penrith Food Project, in turn, led to the establishment of the Hawkesbury Food Program and Sydney’s Fresh Food Bowl Network, two local government initiatives. In addition to addressing the themes of food security and environmental sustainability and justice, links were established with farmers in the Sydney Basin by Sheryl Jarecki (Parker 2007). She arranged for participants in the Villawood Food Project to visit farms in the adjacent peri-urban areas, which “really opened our eyes to another perspective” (Martinez 2011 pers. comm.).

In May 2005, a Food Fairness Forum was held in Liverpool, an outer suburb of Sydney, attended by about 90 participants. This forum identified many issues, including the need to push for state food policies. The forum’s network included Liverpool City Council’s South Creek Agricultural Education Partnership Project, the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales, and Uniting Care Burnside. However, at this early stage most links were being forged between individuals (often working for relevant organizations) rather than between organizations per se.

The range of questions for discussion at the forum highlighted the strong social justice component of the embryonic Sydney Food Fairness Alliance:

How can food feed jobs and the local economy?

How can we regain culture and community through food action?

Why is agriculture and land preservation in the Sydney Basin important?

How are poverty and food security related?

The forum brought into sharp focus one of the principal criticisms that food movements comprise elitist, white, middle-class people who can afford all the good food they could possibly wish to eat (Guthman 2008; Johnston 2008). As one Alliance member notes:

[The] term food security has been hijacked/reinterpreted by those who see only one half of the food system – production – and overlook the right of access to health-enhancing food so that we are developing a two-tier food system; expensive organics and farmers' markets for the wealthy and educated, and cheap, less-nutritious food for those on low incomes who then get blamed for being obese.

This view is countered by Donald and Blay-Palmer's research into small- and medium-sized food manufacturers in Canada when they found that "contrary to a widely held view, the creative-food industry is not just about promoting exclusive foods for the pleasure of [an] urban elite. Rather, it offers an opportunity for a more socially inclusive and sustainable urban development model" (Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006 p. 1901). These divergent views highlight the very strong beliefs and emotions held about food. At a follow-up meeting four months later a decision was made to form the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance. Working subgroups were established: education and research; communication and networks; local council and planning; and advocacy. Each had nominated "champions" who volunteered to take action in those broad areas.

8.4 Formal Launch, Governance, and Activities

The Alliance was formally launched in NSW Parliament House in October 2006, during Anti-Poverty Week. The venue highlighted the value of establishing political contacts and the importance of lobbying. Frances Parker as a speaker at the launch of the SFFA provided a range of views, ranging from social justice (with speakers such as Auntie Beryl Van-Oploo, who runs an Aboriginal café and catering traineeship project, and the former president of the International Council on Social Welfare, Professor Julian Disney, who initiated Anti-Poverty Week) to the loss of agricultural land due to urbanization, with its effect on local food production, and the livelihoods of farmers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Incorporation as a non-profit in (the same year) led to the establishment of an elected formal management committee that has since varied in size from seven to 10 members. Most of the Alliance's work has been by volunteers but since August

2010 a part-time worker has been employed one day per week. An immediate task was to prepare a comprehensive submission to the consultation process for the Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, specifically to highlight that effective planning for sustainable food systems must be considered, including the planning of both urban areas and agricultural lands on the city's fringe.

Outreach activities included establishing a website and list server as an essential component of the communication strategy, and publication of the first six discussion sheets: What is the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance?; Understanding food miles; Options for an alternative food system; What are community gardens?; Understanding food insecurity; and People gather around food: celebrating food and culture. (Other topics have been added since: Why do we need a food policy?; Sydney Basin Agriculture: local food, local economy; Food and climate change; Where has all our food gone? influences on the global food supply; Overweight and obesity: the hidden role of food insecurity.) (SFFA 2009).

Over the next two years a strategic plan was developed; members participated in, and gave presentations to, a range of seminars and organizations; submissions were made to a range of inquiries, and links were established with international organizations also striving for fair food systems, such as Sustain in Britain. The Alliance supported the retention of an inner-city, heritage-listed market garden operated by Chinese market gardeners that was under threat from the expansion of Botany cemetery; and the retention of agricultural land at Hurlstone Agricultural High School in Western Sydney.

One outcome of lobbying efforts was invited membership of the Agricultural Reference Group, tasked with reviewing agriculture in greater Sydney under the Metropolitan Strategy process. However, membership of such bodies is not necessarily an indicator of success in influencing policy. It raises questions about "how food movements construct policy from positions in civil society and outside the state and the contradictions of working with and through the state to implement food security policies" (Wekerle 2004 p. 378). The Alliance made a submission to the Federal Government's National Food Plan in 2011, urging the Commonwealth to establish a national food security agency or ministry, to work in tandem with state and local authorities on a major overhaul of the country's food system.

8.5 Food Summit: Hungry for Change

The Alliance decided that holding a public food summit would be the best way to bring together people and organizations concerned about the future of food in NSW, to debate these issues, and to urge the government to take action. The initial idea was to hold a single event but it soon expanded to encompass six lead-up events in different parts of Sydney city and adjacent regions. "It just kept on growing and getting larger," an organizing committee member said. This "regionalization" would shape the resulting food policy declaration in ways that could not have been imagined when a single event was being planned. A presummit launch at NSW Parliament House in May 2009, attended by some MPs, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, academics,

Sydney Basin farmers and members of the public, was reported in print and broadcast media, generating publicity for the summit.

The October 2009 food summit, Hungry for Change, and its associated events attracted more than 860 participants in total. The two-day summit included guest speakers, such as Jeanette Longfield of the British food and advocacy NGO Sustain, and workshops on the themes of food security and access; planning for future food; sustainable food production; food safety and health; actions; and visits to local farms and community gardens. Delegates debated proposals from the regional lead-up events, and other contributions, into a formal Declaration of Food Future that was presented to a cross-party group of politicians at NSW Parliament House at the summit's conclusion. The full declaration is as follows:

Declaration on Future Food

Developed at Hungry for Change Food Summit 2009

The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance (SFFA) calls for the formation of an independent Food Policy Council with state-wide responsibility to develop and ensure the security of the state's food supply.

The Council would adopt an integrated approach inclusive of:

- Protection in perpetuity of prime agricultural land and the agricultural water supply.
- Compliance of agricultural production and distribution with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.
- Access to affordable and adequate fresh food irrespective of income.
- Investigation of innovative measures such as tax reforms and subsidies to promote access to healthy foods and reduce the burden of chronic disease.
- A cautionary approach to approving new food production and processing technologies to ensure food safety.
- Adequate funding for agricultural research and development that complies with principles of ecologically sustainable development and especially the growing organic industry.
- Ensuring fair economic returns to farmers.
- Support for the development of community-based and regional food systems which support regional economies and improve food access.
- Ensuring people have access to information so as to make informed food choices.

Facts Support the Declaration Proposals

These proposals were developed during the SFFA 2009 Food Summit, Hungry for Change (SFFA 2009). The Summit and its lead-up events across Greater Sydney attracted over 850 participants including primary producers, local

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government, welfare, social justice and religious organizations, academics, citizens, environmentalists, and others.

Supporting this Declaration on Food is a number of accepted facts:

- Diet-related diseases are rising so fast, health costs will overtake state budgets by 2030.
- More than a million Australians including 500,000 children cannot afford nutritious food.
- 27% drop in agricultural production by 2080 is predicted if climate change is unchecked; urban development is taking over 50% of current farmland in Sydney Basin; Australia has shortfall of 1,200 agriculture graduates p.a; the peaking of global oil extraction will raise food prices through increased transport and fertilizer costs.
- Projected population growth in Australia and the Sydney region (to seven million) will need more food;
- Lack of inter-sectoral planning to meet future food needs.

Time for Action

The SFFA asserts that access to adequate food is a human right. The security of the food supply is now firmly on the public agenda. Organizations in other cities, states, and countries are working with their governments to develop future food strategies. It is time for NSW to do likewise. The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance is ready to work constructively with government in developing the proposal for a Food Security Council.

(Source: SFFA [2009](#))

8.6 Developing a Food Policy

Worldwide, there is growing concern about the fault lines appearing in the food system and the lack of planning for future food security. Western food policies are not a new phenomenon: they evolved in the first half of the twentieth century in response to the Depression and World War II. The oil crisis in the 1970s refocused attention on the need for food policies, and the twenty-first century threats from climate change and depleting energy sources have lent new urgency to policy-making. Lang et al. (2009 p. 7) developed what could be regarded as a generic, theoretical food policy, which can be described as an “off-the-shelf” sustainable food policy that could be applicable just about anywhere in the world, at any geographical scale (Fig. 8.1). It shows the highly complex nature of a modern food policy, and the competing forces at play.

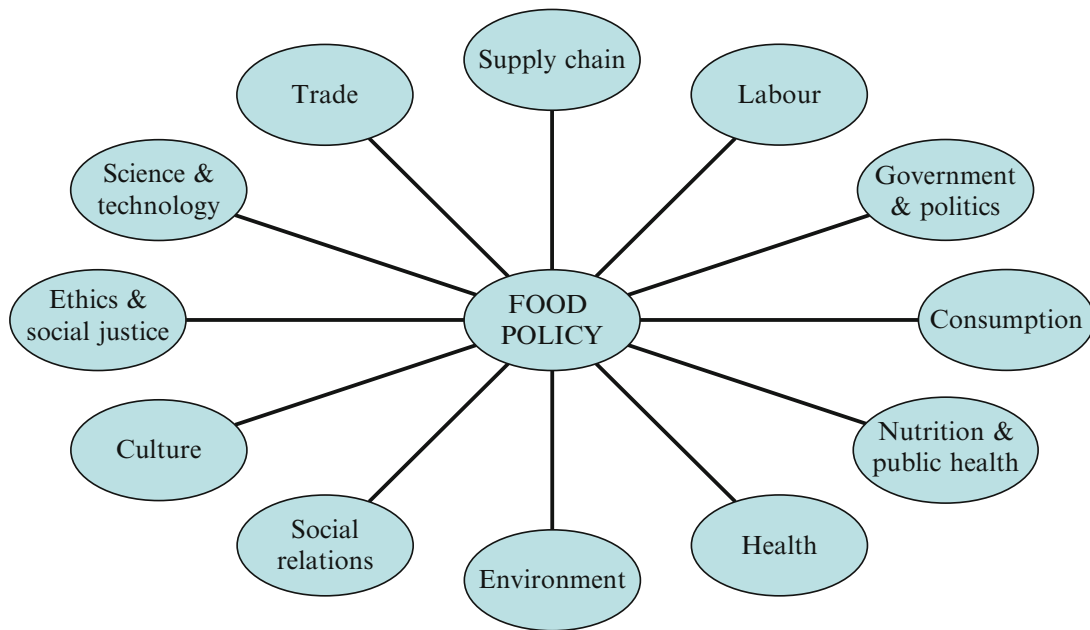


Fig. 8.1 Food policy as an intersection point of competing issues

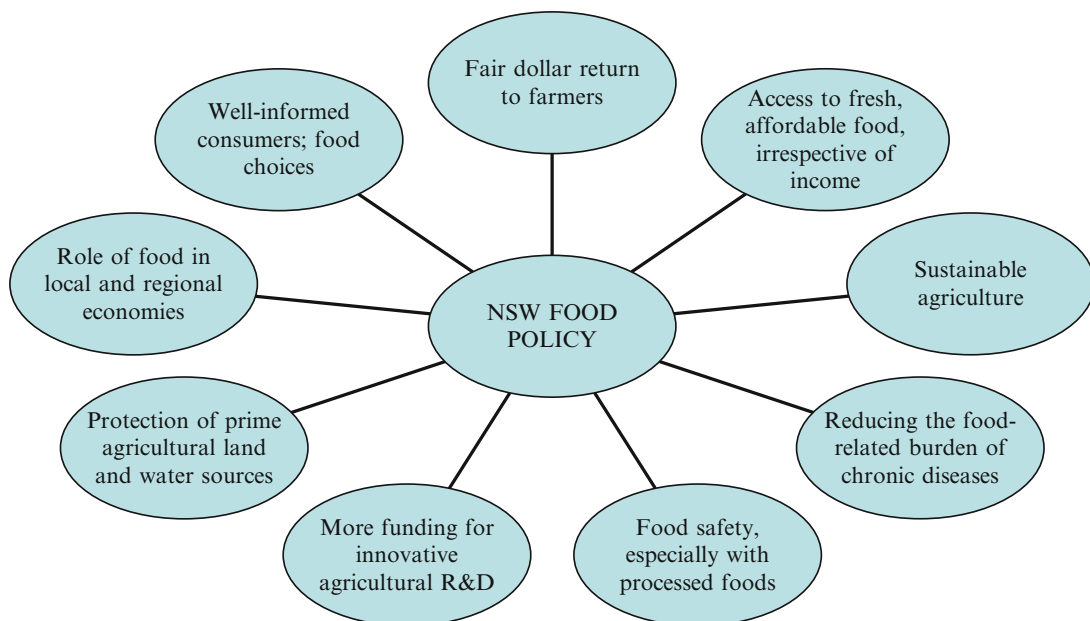


Fig. 8.2 The essential elements of an NSW food policy

The Alliance believes that developing a food policy requires a bottom-up approach, consistent with the participatory approaches used throughout the organization. A food policy needs to reflect the specific issues and concerns of the communities involved in the consultation process. The summit's framework for an NSW food policy is depicted in Fig. 8.2.

Both the generic and place-specific models highlight the centrality of the concept of food democracy in policy-making, namely that the process is fully inclusive

and stakeholder-driven (Lang et al. 2009). The same authors highlight the extreme complexity of devising food policies, asking: “How could food policy-makers and institutions address this awesome array of problems [in a holistic food system]? It will require considerable change, intelligence and effort” (Lang et al. 2009 p. 45). However, “few politicians or others in power situations seem to have an understanding that the food system needs to be viewed and managed holistically” (Alliance member).

Attempting to change a country/state/city’s food system and devising a food policy can exact a heavy toll on food movements’ predominantly volunteer core. The Canadian food activist and author Wayne Roberts, also manager of the Toronto Food Policy Council, says “food policy councils which take the policy in their middle name literally do burn brightly at first. But then they burn out, for the simple reason that there is no-one in government who has a real job with a serious operational responsibility who has the time or mandate to hear, deal with, champion or implement a comprehensive and sustainable food policy” (Roberts 2010 p. 175). There are many challenges in devising a workable, integrated food policy particularly when “policy integration is not only required horizontally across policy sectors, but also vertically through different levels of governance” (Barling et al. 2002 p. 557). This problem is compounded in Australia by the federated system of government. The Alliance has recognized the need to advocate for state-wide food policies as well as a national food policy that might emerge from the federal government.

8.7 Strengths, Weaknesses, and Achievements

The Alliance has provided a forum to increase community and political attention to the food system, thereby providing “legitimacy” to many of the issues previously marginalized in the public discourse and receiving limited attention, such as land use. As noted by one Alliance member: “There is now a groundswell of interest.” The widespread interest shown in the Food Summit in 2009 and its lead-up events showed a wide range of people care, and are concerned about, the food system, and its future. For example, according to one Alliance member:

On my own, or even working through my organization, it would have been impossible to achieve any of these things. Working together my individual efforts and efforts of my organization have been magnified. I have learnt huge amounts from the events but also from the other people involved.

Some members, especially those who have been working on the issues for many years, however, have grown frustrated that little progress appears to have been made, in that the same issues are still being discussed as were raised many years ago. Others, however, have noted the “amazing success of the SFFA when they do not even own a cupboard”.

8.8 Diversity of Memberships and Participants

The diversity of the Alliance's membership is a major strength. The organization draws on a vast pool of expertise, and their extensive networks and contacts. Many members have worked in their specialized fields, in comparative isolation, for decades. They joined the Alliance to meet like-minded people to bring about the change they see as essential. For example, one member who works in health said:

I was frustrated with the system's inability to provide adequate nutrition for the frail elderly without relying on artificial supplements. Determined that I could achieve more outside the system than in it, I joined SFFA.

Another member said the Alliance had "brought together many players and concerns; (with) mutual listening; developing a shared vision; everyone seems to be generous and support one another". This diversity has had a synergistic effect. Those previously focused on environmental sustainability and food production, for example, may not have considered the impact of poverty and urban planning on the accessibility of food.

8.9 Volunteers/Leadership/Management/Governance

The volunteer base is a strength as these individuals bring extraordinary passion and energy as well as important contacts, giving the Alliance access to networks and contacts that may not be otherwise available. Progress, however, can be slow in a volunteer organization that has a highly participatory philosophy and decision-making procedures. As one Alliance member said:

The Alliance has adopted a very democratic style of management, affording the management committee and other members the opportunity to debate and vote on a range of organizational and issue-based matters. Whilst this is very welcome, when coupled with the reliance upon volunteers it has sometimes meant a delay in action.

Governance and the management and organizational structure have evolved as the Alliance has grown. The desire to be participatory is seen as a major strength although it is sometimes frustrating for some participants as it may lead to an apparent delay in action. There have been three presidents since the Alliance was incorporated. This is a difficult role requiring commitment, considerable patience, and an ability to work with people with diverse viewpoints and ways of working. There is a remarkable sense of goodwill among participants, and a willingness to consider alternative viewpoints. Moreover, as attendances at meetings varies, there is often a need to extend discussion of a particular issue to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to contribute to the debate and decision-making.

A key leader of the Alliance noted that there are:

Relatively small numbers involved actively, but a very large number interested and supportive. Time is needed to develop and maintain the infrastructure. Sometimes there is a tension

between a looser knit or tighter organizational structure. This is evident in the “quality control” required for [formal SFFA] submissions, publications, presentations and papers. Some resent this and believe we should trust everyone; others believe that we need to maintain the credibility we have developed and check each other’s work, but sometimes this is not possible given the need to meet deadlines, and the fact that most work is voluntary. In principle it is an excellent process to have work checked by as many people as possible, since others may provide different perspectives on the work, but often there is insufficient time to do this. There is also a different perspective in that some believe we should focus on community solutions and action, believing that governments will rarely act, whereas others believe that we should focus on achieving appropriate government policy and action. The reality is that we probably need both, and it is useful to have these different perspectives in the one organization.

8.10 Lack of Funding

Running the Alliance on a shoestring was the key barrier to growth and effectiveness that was identified by participants, specifically that full-time staff could not be employed. This may lead to an unsustainable workload in organizing large public events such as the Food Summit, and an inability to follow through after such events. As one respondent noted:

Reliance upon a band of dedicated volunteers, some of whom have been here from the beginning while others have come and gone, has gotten the Alliance a long way, but given the raft of issues that confront our food system, a lack of human and other resources has meant the SFFA has yet to reach its potential.

The Alliance received sponsorship from range of organizations for the Hungry for Change summit. Sponsors included local authorities, NGOs and state and semi-state bodies, contributing both monetary and “in-kind” or goodwill sponsorship. One Alliance member commented: “It is a real Catch 22 situation: public support for an organization like the Alliance has to be shown before funding is likely to be obtained; getting the message out there is difficult without money.”

8.11 Advocacy/Networking/Communication/Education

Advocacy is at the heart of the Alliance’s work. It draws on political contacts, and uses both reactive advocacy (responding to issues as they arise, such as through writing submissions and making presentations) and proactive advocacy (such as lobbying for the formulation of an NSW food policy). Clearly, important issues will only be effectively addressed if the power of the community is harnessed to drive ideas and actions. Advocacy has been achieved through the interrelated activities of networking (bringing diverse individuals and groups together), through communication (the list server and production of discussion sheets), and education (organizing high-profile public events as well as local action).

Communicating the activities and discourses of the Alliance is a substantial part of the day-to-day work of the organization. The Alliance has maintained a website

since its inception, where all its policy documents, submissions, and discussion sheets can be found, as well as forging links with other food-related organizations and publications. Social media offers a potentially wider dissemination of the Alliance's message, and in 2010 it began regular postings on Facebook and Twitter, especially targeting a young demographic. In their analysis of the concept of food citizenship, through a case study of the Toronto Food Policy Council, Welsh and MacRae (1998 p. 239) say: "The central lessons from our experiences ... are ... that food advocacy must be framed more broadly than traditional social justice conceptions and must embody the concepts of food citizenship, health and sustainability." This is the multifaceted message the Alliance attempts to convey.

8.12 The Future: The Changing Context

The context of food security has changed markedly since the Alliance was formed, and particularly since many of its members began working on food-related concerns. Many aspects of the food system are now firmly in the public realm, one indication of which is the issues paper for a proposed National Food Plan released by the Federal Government in 2011 (DAFF 2011). Two areas that the Alliance has, to date, not given a great deal of attention to are the food manufacturing industry in Australia, and food marketing, although the duopoly of the country's two principal supermarket chains Coles and Woolworths, and the issue of "junk-food" advertising on children's television, have been hotly debated at some Alliance public forums.

The Alliance was formed when there was relatively little public attention to food security, other than isolated individual projects, or broader issues such as the loss of agricultural land. There was a consensus among survey respondents that after five years the Alliance had made significant achievements but as one member remarked:

It is time now to stop and more carefully assess what we do and how, how to make best use of the resources we have, how to best link with other groups, how to refine and focus our advocacy, how to have most impact. In other words, the Alliance needs to be strategic.

As other new groups in the broad food system area emerge, the Alliance needs to continually assess what formal partnerships will advance its aim of food policies at all levels of government and improving the food system.

8.13 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the history and activism of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance, an NSM that advocates fair and sustainable food policies in Australia; that has a specific target of helping bring about food policies for the state of New South Wales, and assist in shaping a national food policy. It undertakes this task in full recognition of the challenge; of how every aspect of the food system is highly political and that "true reform of our food system requires that we muck ourselves up in the

imperfection of political contestation over food” (Goodman et al. 2012 p. 32). It is an organization driven by social justice principles, and takes as its philosophical starting point that food security is a basic human right, not a privilege.

It is arguably an atypical food movement within Australia in that it attempts to connect stakeholders from all sections of the food system in one organization, rather than being a single-issue activist group. Its diverse membership base is one of its great strengths but its predominantly volunteer core means its most active members may be vulnerable to burnout. Clearly the Alliance “needs to develop strategies to continually refresh the organization” (key member of management committee). Despite limited funding, the Alliance has grown considerably in size since its inception and has, through its activities and advocacy work, gained a public profile that has led to invitations to sit at the table on food-related committees and panels.

The determination of the success, or otherwise, of any social movement is a complex and contested task (Giugni 1998). Thus a crucial question for the Alliance is how well it can judge its efficacy and performance. Is it measured by column inches in the press, seats on consultative bodies, attendance at public events, or by policy shifts or behavior change? And should it be concerned with outcomes (a common measure of success) or processes? These are difficult questions, but it is clear that the Alliance has grown, in a little more than five years, from small beginnings (a meeting of two individuals) to a broad membership of several hundred, and a portfolio of strong advocacy work on food security. Its whole-of-food-system approach has provided a forum for stakeholders across the food system to debate the future of food systems. All the members interviewed for this chapter said they thought the Alliance had been a success by establishing a united voice for the disparate, but linked, concerns about the contemporary food system in NSW and Australia.

Australians are now talking very seriously about domestic food security. Currently the main topics of this debate are the federal government’s setting of a carbon tax, and disputes over water, especially in the Murray-Darling Basin, a major food-producing area in this arid continent. The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance sees itself as having an important role to play in improving the food system, equitably and sustainably, with its diverse membership representing many aspects of the food system, while attempting to break the “silo” mentality on food policy (Dixon 2011) and helping bring about systemic and sustainable change in food security in Australia. As noted by a key member of the SFFA:

We have come up with an idea whose time has come [but] we now need to move beyond the rhetoric to implementation, not only on a local scale as demonstrated by individual small projects, but at a broader level by effectively addressing issues such as urban planning.

Such change requires long-term social and civil action. As Lang et al. (2009 p. 297) write: “Food policy has again become a high-profile ‘hot’ topic ... the entire terrain is characterized by vibrant debate.” The food policy challenge is firmly on the table, and the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance is a significant player in stimulating public and community interest to bring about change.

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