Food system governance in Australia: Co-creating the recipe for change

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This paper represents the third in a series of four food-related discussion papers produced by the Global Change Institute at The University of Queensland – 24 Nov 2017.

1. A research agenda for food systems
2. Urban food systems: A renewed role for local governments in Australia
3. Governance of Australian food systems
4. Healthy and sustainable: Towards sustainable diets in Australia

COVER IMAGE

Food is central to our environment, our social relationships, our health and our economy; but food-related laws, policies, regulatory arrangements and multi-stakeholder relationships are complex, and often not transparent. Photo: shironosov, iStock
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SUMMARY

Transforming food governance has been identified as one of the most pressing challenges facing Australia’s food system. Food is central to our environment, our social relationships, our health and our economy; but food-related laws, policies, regulatory arrangements and multi-stakeholder relationships are complex, and often not transparent. Understanding of current governance arrangements is therefore uneven, incomplete and partial for all stakeholders (government, civil society and the food industry). Thus, tensions around public and private responsibilities, civic participation and policy coherence are high. To cope with unprecedented future challenges (such as environmental uncertainty, changing trade relations, contested public health guidelines, and growing food and nutrition insecurity), Australia will need innovative policy actions. Government, industry and ‘food citizens’ can lead the change, but will require shared visions and more transformative policy spaces to do so.

This paper outlines an interdisciplinary research agenda to improve food system governance. A food systems perspective indicates that we cannot afford to govern food system activities (production, processing, packaging, distribution, retail and consumption) in isolation from food system outcomes (food and nutrition security, public health, environmental wellbeing, social wellbeing and ethics). Governance processes will need to advance common goals between government, industry and society – with social, economic and ecological sustainability, health, resilience and fairness at their core – through methodologies that enable shared visions for future governance scenarios to emerge. The outcome of this research agenda will be to generate shared understandings of current and future food system governance, through meaningful engagement of a wide spectrum of food system stakeholders in Australia.

Two research themes are discussed. First, food system governance – ‘the interactions between public and/or private actors ultimately aimed at addressing collective issues’ (Termeer, Dewulf et al. 2016: 12) – plays a crucial role in connecting food system activities (producing, processing, distributing, retailing and consuming) with food system outcomes that are important for everyone (food and nutrition security, public health, environmental wellbeing, social wellbeing, and ethics). Our analysis draws on the large body of evidence demonstrating that current food governance structures and processes are not meeting public expectations in areas such as food and nutrition security, public/ecological health, environmental sociology, business, ethics and public policy. Second, we propose a research agenda that may assist in identifying progressive spaces for improved food system governance. By involving government, food industry and civil society in analysing current constraints and envisaging food system-based solutions, the proposed methodology aims to improve multi-stakeholder dialogue and build consensus across the food system. Co-creating new visions for food system governance is the first step towards realising food system change.
INTRODUCTION: Enhancing governance of Australia’s food system

We are faced with a great challenge: How can we co-create a better food system – one that is not just economically viable, but healthier, ecologically sustainable, socially equitable and fair? Improving food system governance is at the heart of this dilemma. Governance “forms an integral part in the functioning of food systems”, and so, requires us to “design interventions built on an evidence base evaluating the role that different governance arrangements and regimes has on food systems and food security outcomes” (Delaney 2016: 8). A governance lens also focuses on understanding the positions of, and interactions between, multiple food system stakeholders with often divergent priorities, expertise and viewpoints, as well as how these relationships impact across the food system. While a great deal of research and practice across academic disciplines and industries provides a wealth of knowledge about food governance to date, this remains to be brought together in a systematic, and constructive, way.

This discussion paper outlines a research agenda for understanding and improving the governance of food system activities so as to achieve desirable food system outcomes in Australia. These outcomes include food and nutrition security, public health, environmental wellbeing, social wellbeing, and ethical outcomes, but are defined differently by the varied stakeholders within the food system. These are all part of pursuing the common good; here, this concept provides a clear language to connect across and beyond stakeholder or industry differences, and focuses enquiry into food system challenges and opportunities in a way that emphasises positive co-benefits for everyone, now and in the future.

This agenda asks:

- What is the current relationship between food system governance in Australia and key ‘common good’ outcomes? (food and nutrition security, public health, environmental wellbeing, social wellbeing, and ethics)
- What are the ‘ideal’ visions of different stakeholders, and what are the governance levers we could target to facilitate these outcomes?
- What methodological benefits does a ‘food system governance’ approach provide for decision-making and policy reform?

Part 1 describes the rationale behind the need to focus on governance as a way to address key challenges experienced across Australia’s food system today. This system has many players and numerous governance mechanisms and instruments operating at a variety of levels. Together, the stakeholders in this system need to be cognisant of, and ready to address, the issues that the food system generates. Some of these challenges – complexity, the common good and participation – are discussed next, with reference to literature from the fields of business, public policy, health, sociology and
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Agrifood studies. In bringing together this theory with empirical examples, it becomes clear that we cannot afford to govern food system activities in isolation from food system outcomes (Ingram 2011).

Part 2 describes how a food systems approach could be applied to analyse and address food system governance in Australia. We suggest potential research questions and methods through which to examine the strengths, limitations, trade-offs and potential leverage points through which better food system governance might be achieved. Rather than define possible governance interventions, this paper aims to open up spaces for reflexivity and collaboration between the full range of food system actors, based on the recognition that healthy, environmentally sustainable and fair food systems belong to all of us – they are a common good, requiring the search for shared efforts, understandings and visions. Interventions will emerge from this process.

This research is critical, considering the complexity of social, economic and environmental challenges to food production, trade and consumption in Australia, and therefore, for food system governance. For example, climate change is predicted to reduce Australian wheat, beef, dairy and sugar production by some 9–10% from current levels by 2030, and by 13–19% from current levels by 2050, with agricultural exports expected to decline by between 11 and 63% by 2030 and by 15–79% by 2050. Productivity declines in agriculture by 2080 are anticipated in the order of 16–27% (Cline 2007, GRAIN 2009). The health and environmental costs of unsustainable production and consumption patterns are also set to increase (Reisch, Eberle et al. 2013), as are landscape, land use and climate pressures on agricultural systems (Lawrence, Richards et al. 2013).
Social and environmental indicators of food system problems

An estimated 5% of the Australian population is food insecure, with particular groups more susceptible to higher rates of food insecurity: including unemployed people (23%); single parent households (23%); low-income earners (20%); rentals households (20%); young people (15%); indigenous people (24%); culturally and linguistically diverse groups, such as refugees; and socially isolated people or disabled people. (Rosier 2011)

Public health research indicates that in 2014–15, 63.4% of Australians aged 18 years and over were overweight or obese (11.2 million people), comprised of 35.5% overweight (6.3 million people) and 27.9% obese (4.9 million people) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015). More than 90% of people do not consume enough fruit or vegetables daily (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016).

Power within the food system is unequally distributed; for example, two main supermarkets control approximately 67% of food retailing (Spencer and Kneebone 2012). Australia has the most concentrated retailing sector in the world, with numerous implications for public health and sustainable consumption (Wardle and Baranovic 2009).

Ecological costs of agricultural productivism include biodiversity loss from land clearing, soil erosion and salinization from over-clearing and over-irrigation, acidification attributable to over-use of fertilizers, and greenhouse gas emissions (Williams and Saunders 2005). The expansion of farming and grazing has resulted in the clearing of up to 90% of vegetation, 50% of rainforests and 30% of woodlands in some places. (Lawrence, Richards et al. 2013).

Looking to the future, climate change is expected to result in more extreme weather events such as floods and drought, with implications for the productivity and resilience of Australia’s food systems (Smith, Lawrence et al. 2015). Climate change, in combination with other ecological hazards and changes, will also have important public health impacts (Edwards, Dixon et al. 2011).

These examples suggest that Australia is a long way from achieving many of the conditions underpinning “a successful food system … that delivers high wellbeing, social justice and environmental stewardship” (NEF 2014). In response, multiple food system actors – namely governments, retailers and industry – are engaged in efforts not only to improve agricultural production or trade, but also to improve market-based food regulation (i.e. voluntary regulations, standards, certification schemes). Consumers and ‘food citizens’ are also increasingly seeking alternatives to the traditional market approaches, and are expecting greater choice, equity, sustainability outcomes and fairness. Alternative food sourcing and delivery models are emerging – from local farmers’ markets to purchasing on-line for organic or low food-miles produce; while not without their challenges, these alternative food systems present a challenge to ‘business
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... although Australia has well-developed food, health, safety, trade and agricultural policies, there remains no cohesive approach to ‘food system’ governance across the board.

Recent reform: a failing experiment?

In 2013, the Australian Government released the country’s first National Food Plan (NFP) and FOODmap, an analysis of Australia’s food supply chain. The NFP set out 16 goals for the food system until 2025, with four key themes: growing exports (trade and branding); thriving industry (agricultural productivity, innovation, skills, infrastructure, biosecurity, digital economy, regulatory efficiency); people (access to safe and nutritious food, food safety, information, education, agricultural technology transfer); and sustainability (sustainable production, environment, reducing food waste)(DAFF 2013). It was industry-driven, but invited submissions on the content of its green paper by the broader community. It has since been abandoned by successive governments.

The NFP was widely criticised by industry and community groups on account of both its drivers (supermarkets and industry) and outcomes (an export plan, not a plan for health, equity or food security)(Rose 2012). It was not overly reformist, let alone progressive or visionary, as one submission to the government commented:

The original stated goal of the National Food Plan was to assess food sustainability, affordability and security. The Paper, however, only briefly addresses any of these issues. The Paper reads as if the goal of food policy in Australia is to enhance the brand of Australian food and help to feed the world, particularly Asia and China. Many of the existing policies articulated in the Paper seem to have only a tenuous link with agriculture and food. Of the new programs and projects almost all are export oriented. Where the Paper makes links to actual producers and processes, it is limited to calls for them to become more export oriented and water efficient and to reduce emissions. (Dosser 2013)

In response, the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) released their own People’s Food Plan. AFSA is a community ‘fair food’ coalition of eaters, farmers, community organisations, small-to-medium size food businesses and nutrition, health and other advocacy organisations, whose alternative plan was in direct response to what they saw to be a “flawed public consultation process” and bias of the NFP. According to AFSA, their plan “represents the aspirations of hundreds of thousands of Australians for a fair food system ... a system that puts our health and wellbeing first ... that of our farmers ... and that of our beautiful land and waters” (AFSA 2012). This alternative plan identified 10 key focal points for reform: food production (supporting farmers and regional food systems); participatory urban agriculture, indigenous food sovereignty, new food technology...
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(precautionary and proactivity principles); food waste to resource, supply chains (intersections with nutrition, procurement policy); trade (fair not free, labour and environmental standards, supermarket ombudsman); authentic free choice (labelling, advertising to children, food product disclosure); education and culture; and food democracy (stakeholder dialogue, transparency and accountability).

Promoting and refining this plan remains a core activity for AFSA; it informs a growing number of local and regional community efforts at food policy reform throughout the country, but has not been taken up formally within the government.

Reforming food system governance has also been attempted in other countries and regions (including in Australia). For example, the EU is currently developing a Common Food Policy for the European Union, having recognised the need for multi-stakeholder driven, food systems-based food policy. In it, sustainable food systems are seen as central to a new economic vision for the region, and where agricultural reform, decent jobs, health and democracy are key concepts. The process is being convened by the former “UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food” with the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food), and will:

... convene scientists, civil society groups, grassroots organisations and policymakers from various governance levels. The process intends to bridge the different policy areas (agriculture, trade, environment, health, etc.) and different policy levels (EU, rational, local) through which food systems are governed, identifying priorities for reform and bringing them together under a single roof. (IPES-Food 2017)

Some cities have also embarked on a process of ‘common food policy reform’:

- The Toronto Food Policy Council proposes five key concepts to improve the food system in Canada and guide national consultations: The human right to food; healthy and sustainable diets; sustainable food systems; make food a part of reconciliation; invite more voices to the table.
- The Melbourne Food City plan aims “to improve people’s health and wellbeing by promoting a food system that is secure, healthy, sustainable, thriving and socially inclusive through partnerships, leadership, advocacy, education, community development, regulation, infrastructure management and research.”
In North East Victoria, recent work on developing a Local Government Food Policy and Strategy highlights the need to foster a "thriving, equitable, healthy and sustainable food system" through supporting food enterprises, improving food and nutrition security, celebrating diversity, and economic development of the local food sector.

A way forward?

At the national and international level, Australia appears to be falling behind on food system governance, although attempts at local and regional levels are gaining momentum. This further provides a strong political, ethical and business case for a renewed research and policy agenda, with governance at its centre. A food systems approach – one that embraces the interconnections and co-benefits between food system activities, outcomes and the different worldviews of stakeholders or interest groups – has the potential to generate very different governance reforms. Translating what is meant by sustainable food systems is, however, a matter of bringing together complex standards, values and modes of delivery, from production to consumption (Lang and Barling 2012). Greater understanding, communication, coordination and collaboration between stakeholders are needed, in recognition that who participates, who has the power to make decisions and whose voices are heard will affect both food system activities and outcomes for years to come. As Lang and Barling (2012) observe:

While there is growing awareness of food systems’ capacities being under stress, there is as yet less recognition of how extensive change must be before food systems are sustainable … This requires a more coherent policy framework than currently exists, a goal thwarted by competing solutions vying for policy attention and policy failure thus far to integrate the complex range of evidence from social as well as environmental and economic sources into an integrated policy responses.

Transforming food governance is therefore one of the most pressing challenges facing Australia’s food system (Candel 2014).
PART 1: THREE CHALLENGES FOR FOOD SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

Defining governance
There are many definitions of governance in the literature. In this paper, we understand governance to broadly refer to: “The traditions, institutions and processes that determine the exercise of power in society. Governance systems and structures define how society makes decisions on issues of public concern, how citizens are given voice in public decision-making, and how social partners work together to create public goods.” (Bettini and Head 2016: 6)

Candel (2014: 589) has also observed a plurality of definitions for food system governance, including the following: “The formal and informal interactions across scales between public and/or private entities ultimately aiming at the realisation of food availability, food access and food utilization, and their stability over time.”

Taken together, these definitions inform our approach to food systems governance developed in this paper.

Governance, in general, can be understood as "managing, steering and guiding of public affairs by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner"(Pisano 2011: 3). As the sustainability, health and ethical challenges associated with food systems widens, the measure of good governance will likely need to integrate broader social, economic and environmental concerns (Lang 2009). Indeed, recent research from the UK argues that a successful food system will need to: have a neutral or positive environmental impact; better use energy and other inputs; support species and genetic diversity, support good jobs; simplify supply chains; include a wide set of stakeholders in controlling assets; foster a positive food culture and high levels of public health; and make food affordable and accessible to all (NEF 2014). Both the goals and the processes for achieving them represent significant challenges.

There are many knowledge gaps around how to apply a food systems perspective to questions of governance. For example, there is limited understanding of what governance arrangements are best suited to producing specific sustainable food system outcomes (Delaney 2016). Ensuring the Australian food system’s ability to adapt to multiple challenges, including climate change, demographic change, global economic and trade conditions, and resource depletion, can be characterised as a complex or "wicked" problem for policy makers and the many other parties involved (Head, Ross et al. 2016). For example, the food system forms a nexus with energy, water, land use and natural resource management systems (Green, Cranston et al. 2017), and has significant cultural and ethical components. The issues these systems face are multi-faceted,
contested, and involve numerous actors with diverse and conflicting responsibilities, influence, values, perspectives and priorities. Laws, policies, regulatory arrangements and stakeholder relationships are complex, and tensions around public, private and civic power and participation are high.

In this section, we explore just some of the ways that the challenges of complexity, the common good and participation have been theorised in the academic literature on food systems, or enacted in Australia or internationally. In our reading of these studies, we can identify a number of key, interconnected messages that inform the approach developed in the remainder of the paper:

- Governance of complex issues – such as the sustainability and ethicality challenges facing the food system – requires broadening our view from supply chain production, trade and consumption to consider wider social, ecological, political and economic factors, and their interconnections.
- The concept of the 'common good' is familiar to global food governance, and already provides some concrete mechanisms to embed new values into food production and consumption (such as standards or metrics). We suggest that this concept could also mobilise national and local level food actors in Australia to build a shared vision of governance for the future.
- The process of doing ‘good’ food system governance necessitates enhancing participation, democracy and voice, especially for marginalised groups, and will inevitably require power relations to shift.

A food systems approach can encompass these considerations.

1. Complexity

**What is a complex system?**

A food systems approach applies systems science. This way of thinking adopts perspectives that encompass the inherent complexity of societal problems and avoids inferences being drawn from narrowly focussed investigations at one level at the expense of others (e.g. just focussing on consumer behaviour to explain poor outcomes of food). A food systems approach also enhances transparency, as it draws in diverse stakeholder views and provides some protection against narrow sectoral perspectives dominating discourse.

The features of a complex system include: distributed leadership, feedback loops, structure of information flows, reducing delays in information flows and rules of the system. The complexity of food systems is illustrated in Figure 1 below.
Food systems are already incredibly complex, but critical analyses of power and governance have further highlighted the complex relationships between food system inequalities and structural conditions. For example, Smith (2016) argues that multiple social, environmental and political failures of a global food system clearly converged during the world food crisis in 2008. Industrial agriculture, neoliberal economic and trade policy regimes, and a host of new (and not-so-new) global structural conditions (globalisation, industrialisation/ productivism, corporatisation, marketisation, and financialisation) intersect, but have not solved problems of inequitable access or rising costs of food, over-reliance on fossil fuels, poor labour conditions, insufficient nutrition or distorted trade relations.

These are exacerbated by population growth, decreasing agricultural productivity, and uncertain climate change impacts. Hunger (calorie deficit) has decreased while malnutrition (micronutrient deficiency and overconsumption) has increased; rural poverty persists; livelihood options for the rural poor have decreased; and environmental degradation linked to unsustainable food production and consumption practices shows few signs of slowing (see also Rosin, Stock et al. 2012). The Australian food system sits within this global complexity, as well as bringing its own unique national-level issues.

The complexity of food system governance can be illustrated through a discussion of public health. Food systems impact on public health through multiple pathways, with both short term and long term impacts. Most obvious is the connection between food consumption public health and nutrition, such as obesity, nutrient deficiency, disease or unhealthy diets. Furthermore, disease proliferation, environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change associated with industrial agriculture, violations of workers’ rights and safety, and issues with food quality, affordability, processing, safety and security all have direct and indirect impacts on human health and well-being (Lang and Barling 2013). The public health impact of food systems therefore encompasses impacts on workers at all stages of food production, processing, distribution, and waste management, populations affected by activities of the food system, as well as food consumers (Lang and Heasman 2004, Rosin, Stock et al. 2012).

A food systems approach to this complexity recognises the existence of, and interrelation between, diverse social, economic, environmental and technological risk factors for both human health and the health of the natural environment that supports human health. For example, public health research in Malaysia has illustrated how
increased production and consumption of palm oil for food processing impacts (i) the natural environment which supports human health, as palm oil plantations involve land clearing, and ever increasing carbon dioxide emissions result from burning fossil fuels, and (ii) economic and social policy measures have been linked to high calories intake, insufficient physical activity, and obesity. In this case, governance decisions in one realm affect another (Davey, Allotey et al. 2013).

Fig 1. Food System complexity

To date, efforts to document Australia’s food system complexity and the corresponding complexity of governance have largely focused on mapping food supply chains. One example is the National Food Plan white paper. Another is the 2015 National Science and Research Priorities, the associated Practical Challenges, and the Industry Innovation
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and Competitiveness Agenda, in which the food system is a cross-cutting issue that spans the majority of the priorities. Figure 2 below indicates that food-related policies can be found in both the obvious spheres (economic policy, agriculture, fisheries, environment and energy, industry and trade) as well as making some connections with education, labour, health and ageing, social disadvantage, rural policy and emergency management. Supply chain mapping undertaken by the Australian government\(^1\) has been published for supply chains in dairy, beef, lamb/sheep meat, pork, poultry, eggs, seafood, horticulture, grains, beverages, dry groceries, processed fruit and vegetables, food retail, and food service/hospitality. In these documents, the practical challenges and opportunities focus on capacity building around international competitiveness, sustainability, profitability, intensive production capacity and enhanced ‘clean and green’ reputation (Spencer and Kneebone 2012).

\(^1\) (Accessed 15 December 2016).
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Fig 2. Australian government policies that interact with the food system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall policies</th>
<th>Agriculture and fisheries</th>
<th>Environment, climate change and energy</th>
<th>Health and ageing</th>
<th>Industry, innovation, science, research and tertiary education</th>
<th>Infrastructure, transport and emergency management</th>
<th>Regional Australia</th>
<th>Social disadvantage</th>
<th>Trade and foreign aid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia in the Asia Century White Paper</td>
<td>Agricultural and veterinary chemical policy</td>
<td>Clean energy future plan</td>
<td>Australian Dietary Guidelines</td>
<td>A plan for Australian jobs: the Australian Government’s industry and innovation statement</td>
<td>Critical infrastructure resilience strategy</td>
<td>Regional policy</td>
<td>National Indigenous Reform Agreement – Closing the Gap</td>
<td>Foreign aid policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax policy</td>
<td>Commonwealth policy on fisheries bycatch</td>
<td>National waste policy: less waste, more resources</td>
<td>National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health</td>
<td>National Ports strategy: Infrastructure for an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable future</td>
<td>National Urban Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rural research and development policy statement</td>
<td>National Water Initiative</td>
<td>Taking preventative action – a response to Australia, the healthiest country by 2020</td>
<td>Food industry innovation precinct National Research Investment Plan</td>
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</table>

Source: FOODman (2013: 15)
Adapting the food system to address interconnected challenges is not only technically complex, but a demanding governance issue. In dealing with wicked problems, conventional governance approaches are recognised to be unsuitable, insufficient and ineffective (Head and Alford 2015). Much depends on ‘governance capability’, defined as ‘governance actors’ ability to act wisely when facing wicked problems, and the ability of the governance system to enable such acting’ (Termeer, Dewulf et al. 2016). This increasingly requires governance that is more adaptive (Folke, Hahn et al. 2005, Gunderson and Light 2006), integrative (Klinke and Renn 2012), resilient (Lebel, Anderies et al. 2006, Djalante, Holley et al. 2011, Smith, Lawrence et al. 2015) and reflexive (Marsden 2010, Voss and Bornemann 2011, Marsden 2013). And while governments can play and do play a leadership role in enabling conditions, structures and processes for adaptive, collaborative and participative approaches to complex problems (Head and Alford 2015), a growing body of research also emphasises the need for governance which is multi-stakeholder (Utting 2012), poly-centric (Ostrom 2010, Wyborn 2014) and multilevel (Lockwood, Davidson et al. 2009, Pahl-Wostl 2009).

Such approaches underlie the concept of ‘New Public Governance’ (NPG), in which the role of the state is moving from one of control, centred in traditional government hierarchies, towards one of leadership and coordinating policy networks made up of a number of stakeholders – that is, from ‘steering’ to ‘serving’ (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). According to Agranoff (2014: 63) the role of the state:

has been modified to one of leadership, participation and orchestration… from a position of legally based legitimacy coupled with fiscal power… it remains the focus of political identity, and is the main institution of democratic legitimacy; this being the case, other entities view its decisions and commitments as reliable.

Thus, while “many different institutions and stakeholders – both public and private – have some responsibility for or influence over important public outcomes … [public sector] managers have an important role in building collaboration among multiple stakeholders” (Ansell and Torfing 2014: 10). While NPG approaches therefore acknowledge that many parts of the food system are governed privately (through industry self-regulation, for example), the state is especially important in facilitating ‘agri-food transitions’ due to the inherently high level of governmentality of food systems (that is, the complexity of governing so many food system components, actors, responses and outcomes). This has become particularly true since the 2008 global food crisis (Rosin, Stock et al. 2012).

Governments (and other food system actors) have to respond to food system problems within the growing complexity of modern society, and contend with an increasing number of actors nationally, and at the supra-national level with international obligations.
and intergovernmental agreements. However, policy-makers face a number of internal and external conditions and constraints that may support or hinder governance capability, and thus their ability to coordinate policy networks and enable/facilitate collaborative approaches. These include:

**Table 1: The challenge for government in dealing with ‘wicked’ problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordination</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of integration of issues</td>
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<td>2. Fragmentation at the national level – numerous policy domains</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Fragmentation at the global level</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Too few linkages</td>
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<td>5. Turf wars</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Existing governance structures</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. Have often developed in an ad-hoc way over time</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Lack of flexibility in ability to transform</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Policy advisory systems – who has a seat at the decision-making table?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Political, economic and time constraints</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Competing policy priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Turbulence in the political and public sector system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Lack of political will and leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Political palatability of proposed policies and changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Strict accountability rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Focus on the ‘urgent’ (short-term) over the ‘important’ (long-term planning)</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Head 2008, Head and Crowley 2015
2. The food system as a common good

Within the food systems literature, food is most commonly interpreted through the dominant narrative of the industrial food system – ‘food as commodity’ (Vivero-Pol 2017). Another perspective is that the food system – and the ecological, social and political activities and outcomes associated with food – might be better governed as a ‘common good’. According to Vivero-Pol (Vivero-Pol 2017: 182):

Food systems primary goal should be to nourish human beings. And yet, the current industrial food system, with its profit-maximising ethos, is not achieving that goal despite producing food in excess. On the contrary, this system is the main driver of malnutrition on the planet, as well as environmental degradation. Nonetheless, food systems also play a double role as Nature’s steward. Deciding which role we want food systems to play will very much depend on the idea we have about food. What is food for humans?

Currently, most food production processes and markets are governed privately by actors such as corporations or food retailers, according to the principles of private business (Page 2013). Government involvement has generally reduced under neoliberal conditions (Lawrence, Richards et al. 2012) which support de-regulation and the wider shift from government (direct interventions and political authority by the agents of government) to governance (the growth and increasing influence of multi-layered amalgams of state and non-state actors) (Jessop 1998, Parker and Braithwaite 2003). This has been shown to have resulted in bias against less-profitable food system activities (such as smallholder agriculture) or outcomes (such as biodiversity), contributing to the food systems’ inability to address the needs of the most vulnerable and food insecure (Page 2013). In particular, Page (2013: 100) argues that it is “the shareholder value concept that may impact negatively on the concept of food security … as its focus is on the gains for the company which may not coincide with the needs of society.” More critically, Peine and McMichael (2005: 24) have argued that market rule benefits agribusinesses the most, by “giving primacy to increased investment, production and trade over social concerns”. Profits are given primacy over all other values, and executives and board members have legal responsibilities to their shareholders. In recognition of this, there is growing support for applying the concepts of common goods or global public goods to food and agriculture, and particularly to market regulation. As Sumner (2011: 63) asks:

Along with other life goods such as potable water, clean air, adequate shelter and protective clothing, food is something we cannot live without… what would a food system look like that was based in life-values, centred on the commons and anchored by social justice?

Common goods refer to two types of commons that are at the heart of sustainable development: the natural commons, which includes shared lands and the biosphere,
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and the civic commons. The latter is co-operative rather than competitive: “It is society’s organized and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources to provide for the life preservation and growth of society’s members and their environmental life-host … what people ensure together as a society to protect and further life, as distinct from money aggregates” (McMurtry 1998: 24). Examples of civic commons include public education systems, universal health-care programs, building regulations, water and power installations, social safety protections, laws, libraries, public broadcast media, sewage systems and social assistance (Sumner 2011). Sustainable food systems obviously rely on agricultural lands and healthy ecosystems now and into the future, but they also necessitate structures and processes that build the civic commons – such as teaching, learning, decision-making, governing and researching. Sumner (2011: 69) argues that enclosing the commons (i.e. via privatisation or corporatisation) reduces sustainability, and conversely, “to qualify as sustainable, a food system would have to focus on activities that contribute to co-operative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to the life good of food.” Governance is one such construct.

Drawing on the global public goods literature (Brousseau, Dedeurwaerdere et al. 2012), key elements of food systems that could be considered public goods include: agricultural production systems that support dietary diversity, environmentally sustainable food production techniques, pest and disease prevention, transparency and efficiency in food commodity markets at all levels, investment in agricultural research and education, nutrition education, adequate regulatory frameworks for food safety and food marketing, adequate pricing for consumers and producers, smallholder livelihoods, the ‘right to food’, and ensuring peace and security in the face of political unrest around food prices (Page 2013). Other suggestions include: food emergency responses, trade and standards, market functioning, environmental protection, competition policy, agricultural research, agriculture-health links, climate change adaptation and mitigation, cross-boundary water, and natural resources (soils, genetic resources) (von Braun 2009). Healthy food free from unnecessary additives and processing (salt, sugar, fats etc.) is a further common good. Some of these are currently the subjects of international governance by organisations such as the FAO, WFP, IFAD, IFPRI, WHO, WB or WTO; at the rational level, the discourse and governance of food-related public goods is less well developed.

A key condition underpinning these frameworks is that “the characteristics of the goods to be provided and their public nature have to be collectively defined… there is no consensual set of norms and beliefs” (Brousseau, Dedeurwaerdere et al. 2012: 1–2). Thus, governance mechanisms are needed through which citizens can recognise issues of common concern, understand their interdependence, and assess the relative values of different goods when analysing costs, benefits, synergies and trade-offs. This is dependent on processes of knowledge generation and its diffusion to decision makers and citizens. Common goods governance, therefore, needs to be democratic, participatory, reflexive and knowledge-based, because “neither a social planning perspective (involving a ‘neutral’ social engineer), nor a market perspective (where all interactions are organised on a quid pro quo basis) can do justice to this complex combination of motivations and interactions” (Brousseau, Dedeurwaerdere et al. 2012: 4).
The challenge for supply chains to include ‘common good’

Corporate social responsibility and ‘ethical sourcing’ are two models through which a host of ethical values have become drivers of corporate behaviour, and involve the revaluing of goods and services to incorporate social and environmental sustainability indicators that benefit the common good. Examples of these, specific to food systems, include: Fair Trade (to address historical trade inequalities), the UK’s ethical trading initiative (based on ILO labour codes), GlobalGAP (an agricultural good practice code) and the Global Compact (a corporate accountability standard). Most major food retailers and processors also increasingly implement their own set of company codes of conduct to address supply chain ethics, agricultural/environmental production, or food and nutrition security. Industry has thus been highly engaged with setting global standards (especially major retailers and global food companies), either in partnerships across industry or with governments and civil society. This trend towards multi-stakeholder standards has subsequently required the development of shared sustainability metrics as a key tool for supply chain governance. For example, to achieve progress on common metrics across companies and sectors, Unilever, Nestle and Danone instituted the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI), the Sustainable Agriculture Code (SAC) and the Cool Farm Tool (CFT) (Higgins 2015).

The benefits of greater supply chain regulation via private/multi-stakeholder standards include improved monitoring, compliance and accountability, some positive sustainability outcomes and enhanced global food chain governance through multi-stakeholder participation. However, with the exception of Fair Trade, most are largely corporate-driven; most attempt to connect consumers and producers via ‘values alignment’; and most use strict audit and regulation methods to ensure compliance. In recent years, a large body of research has highlighted the potential mismatch between ethical values of producers and consumers; however, alongside many examples of negative implications that Northern-led standards and regulations can have on producers in the global South. For example, costs of accreditation are high, locking some smallholders out of export markets, and local cultural norms and values are not often considered (Reed, Utting et al. 2012, Smith 2014, Raynolds and Bennett 2015).

3. Participation, power and democracy

Underpinning food system governance are also the related notions of citizenship, democracy, political participation, social contracts, and agency (Prato and Mulro 2014). For example, research by Marsden (2013) into food system transitions in the UK suggests that as rules, values and assumptions of the old system become increasingly at odds with new expectations (from below) and more uncontrollable landscape pressures (from above), the need for governance innovation grows. Notwithstanding the significance of understanding the operation of more formal food governance...
mechanisms, a large body of research highlights the centrality of issues such as power relations, inclusion/exclusion, knowledge, participation and empowerment in shaping the sustainability of food systems. Writing about governance for resilient regional ecosystems, Lebel et al. (2006: 19) explain:

In exploring the sustainability of regional social-ecological systems, we are usually faced with a set of ecosystem goods and services that interact with a collection of users with different technologies, interests, and levels of power. In this situation in our roles as analysts, change agents, or stakeholders, we not only need to ask: The resilience of what, to what? We must also ask: For whom?

Beneficial outcomes within complex social-ecological systems (as is Australia’s food system) are enhanced when governance processes are more inclusive, participatory, reflexive and deliberative, with a variety of stakeholders involved. Lebel et al. (2006) also add justice and accountability to this list of key governance attributes. In food systems, key questions include who is accountable for ensuring appropriate outcomes are achieved, for achieving distributive justice, and a fair assignment of risk? Is this left to the market? How is civil society engaged? How is equity in the system achieved and maintained?

These questions suggest that notions of democracy and citizenship be extended into the realm of food. Food citizenship “is considered a helpful tool for extending the debate about the rights and duties of citizens to the field of food, and for fomenting participation of all actors in the governance of agri-food systems” (Lozano-cabedo and Gomez-benito 2017: 1). Food democracy – where “people have become active citizens seeking to reclaim control over their food systems and to exercise their right to choose” – is also part of the process by which “people seek to co-design food systems, to participate in shaping them, to recapture them” (De Schutter 2015).

Authors have long examined the connection between social goals, participation and the policy making process, with growing recognition that complex problems (such as the food system) are socially constructed. That is, different problem definitions and solution orientations influence the politics around the issue, the probability of the issue reaching the public agenda, and the types of solutions favoured (Pelletier, Kraak et al. 1999). As Brousseau et al. (Brousseau, Dedeuwaerder et al. 2012: 9–10) write, “deliberative and participatory processes are important, not only to guarantee due consideration of a wide diversity of interests, but also to incorporate multiple experiences and visions”. The participation of diverse actors and viewpoints and the participatory processes by which actors are enrolled into governance have substantive (knowledge-based), instrumental
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(ends-oriented) and normative (democratic) benefits. A focus on participation also acknowledges that tension between shared and divergent values and interests in society is inevitable, and therefore also, that some view/actors may be subordinated to more powerful or persuasive actors (Pelletier, Kraak et al. 1999). A food democracy/citizenship perspective further recognises these challenges and seeks to experiment with novel methods for engaging diverse food system stakeholders in dialogue, debate and visioning. Thus, it is compatible with broader approaches to reflexive and adaptive governance in which social learning, multi-stakeholder/multilevel participation and collaboration are core components for food system transformation.

Finally, governance is ‘political’, in the sense that the distribution (equal or unequal) of power is a central component affecting change (Voss and Bornemann 2011), with real implications for food system outcomes. There is high potential for marginalised and disadvantaged groups to have little say or visibility in food system governance, and as a result, progress to address public health and other food system-related issues is patchy. For example, research has highlighted the limitations of ‘nutritionism’ (a focus on the nutritional value of food to the exclusion of the social circumstances surrounding food choices) for people living with food insecurity (Graham et al. 2016) (Scrini 2013) and how food practices for people living in socio-economically disadvantage can be oriented towards affordability and family nourishment, rather than nutritional value or ecological sustainability (Dixon and Isaacs 2013). Including the voices and perspectives of people from marginalised populations regarding their lived experiences related to food is also critical; failure to do so risks perpetuating disadvantage and amplifying inequities through disregarding barriers for specific groups and the organisations that support them (Frohlich and Potvin 2008).

Democratic governance practices, by contrast, can provide co-benefits to ecosystems and marginalised social groups. For example, in Australia, the emerging promotion of the Indigenous bushfood industry reveals how governing rules – such as maintaining Aboriginal/Indigenous connections within the industry and on governing boards of Indigenous businesses – have promoted Indigenous employment, cultural values and identity, along with benefits to industry, tourism etc. There is also an emerging academic literature on the nutritional benefits of bush foods (Netzel, Netzel et al. 2009). There is also a large body of empirical research that has explored the benefits and limitations experienced in participatory approaches to development more broadly.

As more and more civic and private (i.e. corporate) actors become involved in food system regulation and decision-making, governance that enables meaningful participation of diverse food actors is needed. This reflects a general awareness of the limitations of top-down decision-making and the need for more inclusive and participatory approaches to policy making (Arrundsen, Berglund et al. 2010) as well as
the specific political realities of a globalised food system characterised by tensions between (mainly) market actors and civil society. Marsden has long argued that analyses of food governance are therefore needed that “explore the ways in which the state, [not-for-profits], NGOs and civil society are evolving and enrolling actors in ways which begin to make a difference” (Marsden 2000: 28). Transformational change of food systems governance is also embedded within each of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, placing it at the top of the global development agenda.

The Challenge for Food Citizens

Civil society has become increasingly significant as a governance actor or mechanism compared to market and state actors in recent years. For example, in 2008 and 2009, widespread protests – some violent – over food price rises occurred in over 30 countries (Holt-Gimenez, Patel et al. 2009). These events illustrated the rising significance of civic dissent over inequalities present in food systems around the world and the persistence of ‘business as usual’. Collective civic action has also been highly visible at the level of international food system governance, such as the influence of La Via Campesina (a global peasant movement for food sovereignty) within the FAO’s Civil Society Mechanism within the Council for World Food Security.

As both concept and practice, food citizenship tends to include: an extended concept of the right to food; the assumption of obligations; the combination of public and private behaviour; individual and collective participation; the empowerment of all actors of the agri-food system; the promotion of justice, fairness and sustainability in food systems; and a cosmopolitan character of food citizenship (Lozano-cabedo and Gomez-benito 2017). The ‘expressions of food democracy’ by diverse ‘food citizens’ are influential in reshaping the relationship between food practices, the market and public institutions in ways affecting not only the market economy, but also contributing to an emerging ‘moral economy’ (Renting, Schermerb et al. 2012: 289). Many of these concerns are shared with a food systems perspective.
PART 2: A framework for food systems governance

FOOD SYSTEMS

A systems approach is needed in order to consider the complexity, diversity and contestation inherent in the modern food system, described previously. In contrast to compartmentalised approaches such as food supply chains, commodity systems or even food regimes, systems thinking is widely recognised for its utility in mapping and understanding complex problems, operationalising diverse research evidence, and systematically analysing a range of interventions and policy solutions. It takes into account the interrelations, reciprocity, discontinuity, and dynamic nature of influences within broader contexts, and is able to incorporate the impact of contextual influences on policy making (e.g. political and economic environments, and community sentiment) (Leischow, Best et al. 2008, Meadows 2008, Best and Holmes 2010, Luke and Stamatakis 2012).

Systems thinking is:

- concerned with what can reasonably be left out of strategies and where disinvestment can occur without adversely affecting outcomes (population health, equity, sustainability). This is the feature of systems thinking which is likely to make it attractive to policy-makers/governments
- uses tools such as wide stakeholder engagement, structured dialogues, virtual experimentation with policy scenarios, computer simulation
- interdisciplinary, and not a new science – its methods have been applied to multiple sectors: health; engineering, defence; economics, ecology, social science and business.

One of the first steps in systems science – that makes it highly applicable to understanding complex food systems – is mapping the structure of various relationships (in the system) and numerous interacting factors, encompassing feedbacks and delays. This enables analysis and identification of causal loops that are most influential in determining the behaviour of the system that produces the outcome in question. The mapped system may then incorporate modelling to test outcomes of different scenarios. The process can permit the broader involvement of key stakeholders in model development that may act to foster trust and transparency in policy-making and accelerate policy adoption, implementation, and sectoral change (Atkinson, Page et al. 2015).

A food system goes beyond a focus on food production or food supply chains to “encompass a number of activities which give rise to a number of food security outcomes” (Ingram 2011: 420). Like food security approaches that address social, economic and political aspects of food alongside technical and environmental
dimensions (Candel 2014), a food systems approach accepts the inherent complexity around food security and global change. Research by CSIRO (Foran 2014) has identified four divergent conceptual ‘food systems’ frameworks – agroecology, agricultural innovation, systems, social-ecological systems, and political ecology – highlighting the inherent complexity and contestation around food system problem definitions, understandings of food security, and the tensions and synergies between these frameworks.

The Global Change Institute has developed a food systems model – building on the work of Ingram and others. According to Ingram’s model, activities include food production, processing and packaging, distribution and retail, and consumption. These in turn deliver food system outcomes: social welfare, food security (utilisation, availability and access) and environmental welfare. We add nutrition, public health, social wellbeing and ethics to Ingram’s list of outcomes (see Figure 3). This builds on research into sustainability indicators, which argues that in addition to food security, sustainable outcomes of food systems need also to include nutritional adequacy, ecosystem stability, sociocultural wellbeing, food safety, waste reduction and resilience(Gustafson, Gutman et al. 2016). Sociocultural wellbeing includes concerns around gender equity, labour rights, communities and animal health and welfare; issues we refer here to as ‘ethics’. Ingram’s framework is helpful for identifying and categorising the diversity of mechanisms used by a wide range of actors (state and non-state) to manage food system activities for the achievement of particular food system outcomes. The resulting food systems approach seeks to:

- incorporate the full range of food system actors in dialogue;
- integrate analysis of food system activities and outcomes, from production to consumption;
- assess impacts and identify feedbacks between the earth system and food system;
- identify interventions, synergies and trade-offs; and
- highlight knowledge gaps (Ingram 2011: 417).
We add that food system activities and outcomes are important ‘common goods’, the provision of which are closely connected to achieving sustainable development, food security and social justice more broadly. As discussed previously, research on the ‘common good’ draws attention to both participatory and normative or moral aspects of transforming towards more sustainable or ‘just’ food systems that have not been evenly applied in food systems research to date.

For example, the common good concept acknowledges that healthy and sustainable food systems contribute to the realisation of the ‘right to food’ (de Schutter 2013, de Schutter 2014) for everyone. It also brings to light the reality that, within food system governance, the potential for some stakeholders’ actions or decisions to have negative social or environmental implications for other stakeholders (including the environment or animals) is high (see for example, Campbell 2009). Seeing food system activities and outcomes as ‘common goods’ also provides a framework for thinking about how food system governance might be reimagined, by foregrounding questions such as sustainability/resilience of what, to what, and for whom?
GOVERNANCE

Within the context of a food systems framework, we adopt a definition of governance that is multi-stakeholder and multi-modal. As discussed previously, there are numerous public and private actors at all scales and at all levels across the food system and its many components and functions; these are illustrated in Figure 4. Some work more formally to create, enforce and comply with a myriad of related laws, policies and regulatory arrangements, including government-led instruments (e.g. food safety regulations); industry-led instruments (e.g. farming codes of practice); market instruments (e.g. commodity pricing); and behaviour change instruments (e.g. nutrition education and labelling). Others, typically more from civil society, work to develop and implement numerous initiatives focussed on civic engagement and participation (e.g. social movements, NGOs and consumers). These civic governance processes also represent important ‘niches’ in the food system governance network. There are too, of course, spatial and temporal dimensions to the operation of these formal and informal governance processes.

Figure 4. Components of food systems governance
As previously described, food systems governance is increasingly multimodal, multi-level, multi-scalar, and multi-stakeholder. This brings a unique set of challenges for democratic decision-making in the field of sustainable, healthy and ethical food systems. Ultimately, it is the agency of stakeholders and their networks exercising their formal or more informal governance roles and influences that primarily determine how well food activities are managed and what outcomes are achieved, in what timeframe and for whose primary benefit. Inherent in this complex network of food governance activities are existing and evolving power relationships (for example, aspects of the commercial relationships between the stakeholders operating within the supply chain of various commodity markets). One topical example of this is the power and influence of the two large Australian supermarket chains over their supply chain (Burch and Lawrence 2007). There is also the dynamic relationship between the state (as regulator and overseer of the public good) and private business seeking to maximise sales and income through freedom of consumer choice. Expanding national state and local food governance to engage meaningfully (i.e. in a coordinated, democratic and transparent fashion) with all players in the food system—private and civil actors in particular—within a context of new or significantly reorganised government agreements, would also be complementary to parallel shifts in global food system governance (von Braun 2009).

Alongside the growth in concepts of food system governance (Candel 2014), numerous indicators for measuring or evaluating governance have been identified. One published systematic review of this literature identified 42 commonly used food system governance indicators, which they synthesise into five categories (see Table 1 below). These have been mostly applied to food production, rather than to distribution, consumption or the food system more broadly; and indicators differ depending on the level of governance being explored (global, regional, national, sub-national, local or cross-scale). Interestingly, some indicators—namely ‘common good resources’, fairness, leadership and learning—are described at a universal level but with little applied research in specific regional, national or sub-national contexts. Expanding research to connect these indicators with examinations of governance within specific sectors is a key research gap.
Table 3.1: Food system governance indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Adaptive capacity; leadership; non-state organising; reflexivity; resilience/robustness; responsiveness; revitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual factors</td>
<td>Rule of law; country size; implementation supporting conditions; political stability; public social commitments; resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Accountability; transparency; corruption; deliberation; discursive framing; electoral democracy; empowerment; fairness; gender-sensitivity; legitimacy; participation and multi-stakeholder engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Structure</td>
<td>Centralisation; common pool resource management; cross-scale interaction; governance frameworks; implementation supporting conditions; institutional mainstreaming; legal and economic frameworks; networks; policy framework; polycentricity; scale-specific responsibilities and competences; state capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Effectiveness; favourable initial policy change; outcomes of similar programmes; use of knowledge and science; trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Delaney et al. (2016: 19–20)

TOWARDS A SUITABLE METHODOLOGY

Using food systems (Fig 3.1) as the framework for conducting an analysis of food system governance provides an opportunity for research to engage with multiple food system stakeholders (Figure 3.2), in order to develop a shared understanding around improving the governance of food system activities so as to achieve desirable food system outcomes in Australia. We see governance as a vital process connecting food system activities with food system outcomes, as described throughout this paper and illustrated in Fig. 3.3 below.
Informed by the knowledge that a broad range of indicators for food system governance exists, it follows first that an analysis of food systems governance with the objective of understanding how food security, social wellbeing and environmental outcomes can be enhanced, must understand multiple dimensions – structure, agency, democracy and implementation – within the specific context of the Australian food system. A food systems perspective adds that diverse modes of governance, stakeholder networks and relationships, power and agency in both markets and formal/informal decision-making processes, as well as implementation results, provide the ‘bridge’ between food system activities and outcomes. Feedback between activities, outcomes and governance mechanisms is also continual, and a key aspect in how well the overall system responds, adapts or transforms. Second, when governance is seen as central to food system activities and outcomes, the issues of power, agency, participation and knowledge within food governance processes then emerge as key topics for discussion and analysis. This can/should occur parallel to a more structural analysis of supply chains,
industries and/or regulatory settings. While some of these actors and institutional arrangements have been researched within different academic disciplines, their specific interconnections with food systems activities and outcomes in the Australian context are not sufficiently understood. Third, considering that food systems governance is increasingly multimodal, multi-level, multi-scalar, and multi-stakeholder requires the use of participatory research methods that facilitate broad and meaningful participation from all food system actors.

Applying the above methodological lens to food systems governance highlights two interconnected research themes for further research:

**Table 3.2: Themes for further investigation**

**Aim 1:** Develop a shared understanding of current food governance policies, institutions and processes: strengths, opportunities and limitations.

*Question 1:* What is the current relationship between food system governance in Australia and key ‘common good’ food system outcomes?

- Food and nutrition security
- Public health
- Environmental wellbeing
- Social wellbeing
- Ethics

**Aim 2:** Envisage progressive opportunities to enhance food system governance for the achievement of ‘common good’ outcomes.

*Question 2:* What is the ‘ideal’ combination of activities and outcomes for different stakeholders, and what are the governance levers we could target to facilitate these outcomes?

- Who are the stakeholders and what capabilities and responsibilities do they each have for ensuring these goals are met?
- What existing governance mechanisms work well, in which contexts, and for whom? Which ones need reform? What new ones are required?
- What trade-offs and complementarities exist, and how can we address these?
- How might law, regulation and/or social policy be strengthened? What might need to be abandoned or replaced?
- What information, resources or learning are required to enable specific modifications to current food system governance arrangements and effective stakeholder participation?
CONCLUSION

Approaching the food system (activities and outcomes) as a ‘common good’ and developing more inclusive governance approaches has been problematic in the past, but today presents a major opportunity for transformation. In this discussion paper, food system governance has been proposed as a potentially rich approach to combining analysis of both the structure of food systems, the inter-relationships between components (activities and outcomes), and the relations of ‘structure and agency’ between diverse stakeholders that shape, constrain or enable this system to deliver effective outcomes. A growing body of empirical research supports this conceptual literature, some of which has been presented in this paper.

Along with the GCI’s Food Systems model, this paper provides a framework that positions food systems governance as a central component linking food system activities (production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption) with food system outcomes (food and nutrition security, public health, environmental wellbeing, social wellbeing, ethics). Literature on food system governance further identifies numerous indicators, many of which refer to the extent to which governance is organised, managed or implemented in ways that are reflexive, adaptive, participatory, multi-level, multi-actor, democratic and/or resilient. The agenda presented here therefore applies systems thinking to (1) encourage deep reflection on the current state of play by multiple food system actors, and (2) has wide and meaningful collaboration between government, industry, community groups, ‘food citizens’ (including consumers) and researchers to define possible futures as a cornerstone of the methodology. The concept of ‘common good’ as it relates to the shared pursuance and achievement of food system outcomes is proposed as a potential platform upon which to build a shared term of reference between diverse food system actors, many of whom are likely to diverge significantly in their priorities and worldviews. Participation, and related notions of food democracy and food citizenship, provides a starting point for discussion about appropriate ways to engage the full set of food system actors in this process.

This discussion paper is intended to provide a first step towards the co-creation of research and policy activities that can assist industry, government and civil society to better connect food system activities and ‘common good’ outcomes in Australia. Exploring this agenda further – through multi-stakeholder dialogue and participatory research – will also contribute a greater understanding of the methodological benefits that a ‘food system governance’ approach might provide for decision-making and policy reform. How can a food systems approach help us to envisage alternative governance scenarios for the future? What specific research methodologies are best for advancing collective, more equitable, ‘common good’ solutions to food system challenges? And what are the direct and indirect benefits to governments, industry, civil society and consumers from taking such an approach? These themes, and others, will be explored in future GCI discussion papers.
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