

## Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

**To:** Minister for Climate Change, Environment,  
Energy and Water

Tracking No.: 24/122840

**Date:** 24/02/2025

**From:** Executive Group Manager, Environment Heritage and Parks

**Subject:** Agriculture and Food in the ACT - Key Findings Report

**Critical Date:** 07/03/2025

**Critical Reason:** In the normal course of business

- DDG, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction 28 / 2 / 2025

## Recommendations

That you:

1. **Note** the information contained in this brief about the finalised *Agriculture and Food in the ACT* report (Report) (Attachment A) – an action of the Canberra Region Local Food Strategy (Attachment B).

**Noted / Please Discuss**

2. **Agree** to publish the public version of the Report (Attachment C).

**Agreed / Not Agreed / Please Discuss**

Suzanne Orr MLA

13/03/25

## Minister's Feedback

I think its best if this goes to cabinet or a sub committee as it covers areas in other portfolios which would need to be considered as part of any future actions arising.

## Background

1. The Canberra Region Local Food Strategy 2024-2029 (Strategy) (Attachment B) was launched by the ACT Government in June 2024.
2. The Strategy establishes a vision for agriculture in the ACT and local region. The Strategy seeks to increase local food production and consumption, increase equitable access to local healthy food, enhance social and economic outcomes through our local food system, and support sustainable urban and rural farming.
3. In accordance with the election commitment of the Government to 'continue work on implementation of the Strategy and support local farmers', an *Agriculture and Food in the ACT* study has recently been completed.
4. This study was funded by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) to improve understanding of the current state of agriculture and food production in the Territory and explore opportunities and barriers for increasing production.

## Issues

5. Natural Capital Economics were commissioned to conduct the study. This study involved desktop research, interviews with agriculture organisations, workshops with Ngunnawal representatives and surveys with ACT rural landholders and consumers.
6. Key findings of the study include:
  - a. Local agricultural production is valued by ACT producers and consumers, with 80.1% of consumer survey respondents stating that they buy local food to support the community.
  - b. The ACT's ability to achieve significant increases in food production within the Territory is thought to be limited given barriers such as climate, soil and land availability.
  - c. Weed management is a top priority for rural landholders now and into the future, with the top short-term goal (1-2 years) being better/continued weed management (37%).
  - d. Support from ACT extension officers with invasive plants or pests was identified as the top opportunity to help reach land management goals by 70.9% of rural landholder survey respondents.
  - e. About half of the consumer survey respondents stated that they produce some of their own food. Top motivators were for wellbeing benefits of gardening (52%), desire for tastier food (49.7%) and saving money (45.2%). Top barriers included unsuitable or not enough space (48.4%), and not enough time (47.1%).
7. The Report (Attachment A) from the study contained information unsuitable for public release, such as maps that identified agricultural production at a lease level and therefore are subject to privacy considerations.
8. As such, EPSDD decided to create a 'key findings' report based on the NCE report. The Strategy and Transformation Office (STO) in Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development assisted in the development of the key findings report.

9. Your approval is sought to publish the key findings report (Attachment C) on the EPSDD website for public access.

#### Next Steps

10. Key findings of the study will inform future actions under the Strategy. Implementation actions will also be determined through collaboration with the Strategy's Community Reference Group (CRG) and future budget processes.
11. The study will support future work of EPSDD to implement the Strategy. This includes a Local Food Chain Infrastructure Study (commencing procurement), a project considering barriers and opportunities to support farmers adapt to drought, as well as the delivery of education and training opportunities.

#### **Financial Implications**

12. There are no financial implications associated with this report.
13. Any opportunities to promote local food production and consumption mentioned in the report have been framed as potential opportunities.

#### **Consultation**

##### Internal

14. EPSDD Communications support the release of the public version of the Report (Attachment C).

##### Cross Directorate

15. Procurement officers from Canberra Health Services and Justice and Community Safety Directorate provided data on local food procurement opportunities for government agencies such as healthcare and corrections facilities.

##### External

16. An ACT food consumer survey was conducted as part of the study to better understand consumer preferences and values. This survey ran from 5-22 April 2024 and received 630 responses from a representative group of the ACT population.
17. Approximately 20 Ngunnawal representatives attended a workshop on 22 June 2024 to discuss current agricultural enterprises/activities within the Ngunnawal community and to consider pathways for achieving aspirations in the future. As the Ngunnawal community has ownership of these findings, workshop outcomes are not captured in this report.
18. Out of 160 ACT rural landholders, 55 participated in a survey to provide insight on the existing uses of rural land including current agricultural production activities. Of the 55 participants who responded, 83% used the land for agricultural production. The survey ran from May to July 2024 and the ACT Rural Landholders Association (RLA) endorsed the survey to increase response rates from their members.
19. Interviews were conducted with 10 organisations to better understand the agriculture and food supply chain in the ACT and local region. These organisations included farmers, industry representatives, wholesale market operators and key retailers. The information gathered from these interviews was anonymised and collated so that it could not be attributed back to any specific organisation.

20. NCE presented the study's initial findings to the RLA on 16 October 2024 at their monthly meeting and to the key stakeholders in an online session on 2 October 2024. Both sessions received positive feedback about the project and initial findings.

#### **Work Health and Safety**

21. Nil identified.

#### **Benefits/Sensitivities**

22. Stakeholders that attended the initial findings presentation were informed that the report would be published by the end of 2024.
23. Due to a diversion of resources, there were delays in finalising the report. Once published, links to the report will be circulated to those that attended the presentations. Positive media opportunities as discussed below may also address this.

#### **Communications, media and engagement implications**

24. Your agreement is sought for EPSDD to explore with your office positive media opportunities associated with the proposed release of the report.
25. A [media release](#) was issued in February 2024 under the previous government to announce the contract with NCE. A similar announcement can be made if required to announce the release of key findings.
26. Subject to your agreement, the public report will be published on the EPSDD website.

Signatory Name: Bren Burkevics

Phone: 6207 8628

Action Officer: Lindsey File

Phone: 6207 4560

#### **Attachments**

| <b>Attachment</b> | <b>Title</b>                                                          |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Attachment A      | Agriculture and Food in the ACT (internal use only)                   |
| Attachment B      | Canberra Region Local Food Strategy                                   |
| Attachment C      | Agriculture and Food in the ACT - Key Findings Report (public facing) |