

# The Crawford Fund for Food Security Submission to Feeding Australia: National Food Security Strategy

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## Executive Summary

The Crawford Fund for Food Security (CFFS) supports the development of *Feeding Australia: National Food Security Strategy*. Our central message is that food security must be recognised as both a domestic necessity and a strategic imperative.

Australia's food security cannot be considered in isolation. It is bound to the resilience of regional and global systems, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Disease outbreaks, climate change, and geopolitical shocks all threaten supply chains, trade, and stability. For this reason, CFFS argues that regional food security must move from a "consideration" in the strategy to a core priority.

Australia's food security is inseparable from that of our near region. As a safe and reliable food supplier, Australia has an indispensable role in maintaining Indo-Pacific stability. The discussion paper supporting the National Food Security Strategy refers to this as a "whole-of-system" consideration. It is our view that this significantly understates its importance.

Regional food security must be elevated from a "consideration" to a central priority for the strategy to succeed.

CFFS endorses the four guiding principles identified in the discussion paper: (i) whole-of-food-system, (ii) collaborative, (iii) ambitious and forward-looking, and (iv) outcomes-based and practical.

The CFFS proposes that five additional principles are needed:

- Invest in people: strengthen the next generation of scientists, extension officers, and policymakers.
- Food security as national security: position it as a pillar of defence, trade, and diplomacy.
- Regional self-reliance: co-design solutions that shorten supply chains and empower local systems.

- Evidence and innovation: ground policy in science and Indigenous knowledge, with long-term R&D investment.

CFFS contributions to Australia's food security include biosecurity training across the Pacific and Southeast Asia; Master Classes and fellowships to train emerging leaders and research and innovation practitioners; sustainable agriculture and nutrition partnerships; and annual conferences that combine science, policy, and practice. These can be leveraged, scaled and expanded to support a future national strategy.

From these foundations, the CFFS submission comments on the three priority areas for the national strategy:

1. Resilient supply chains that anticipate and adapt to shocks.
2. Productivity, innovation, and growth through sustained research investment and community-led enterprises.
3. Competition and affordability can be addressed through sustainable production and reduced waste.

CFFS emphasises the need for an integrated approach to food security, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Food security is about people as much as products, nutrition as much as calories, climate solutions as much as emissions, and stable trade as much as domestic production. Urbanisation and changing diets will demand intensified peri-urban production and new distribution systems while innovative research can point to future pathways to both intensify production and protect the environment.

CFFS emphasises that a well-fed Indo-Pacific is essential to a stable Indo-Pacific. Hunger and malnutrition fuel instability, while food builds trust, prosperity, and cultural exchange. Australia has the experience, networks, and credibility to lead. By elevating regional food security, investing in people and partnerships, and embedding research and evidence in policy, the national strategy can secure Australia's own future while strengthening resilience in the region.

Agriculture must be reframed not as a liability but as a partner in climate and food system solutions.

The Crawford Fund for Food Security stands ready to work with DAFF and the National Food Council in designing and delivering this vision, drawing on its legacy of enabling Australia to *do well by doing good*.

## Introduction

The Crawford Fund for Food Security (CFFS) applauds the government’s recognition of the need for a national strategy and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of *Feeding Australia: National Food Security Strategy*.

Our mission is to advocate for and support Australia’s contribution to, and benefit from, international agricultural and food research. We recognise that Australia’s food security is intimately linked to regional and global systems, trade, communication, and security. The Fund has successfully contributed over the last 36 years to Australia’s impressive achievements in progressing food security in our region, and linking Australian people, industry and agencies to “do well by doing good”.

Our view is that food security is both a domestic necessity and a strategic imperative. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute’s *National Food Security Preparedness Green Paper* highlights risks that include:

- disease outbreaks in Australia or the region, capable of devastating agricultural production and cascading through trade, food availability, and economic stability; and
- geopolitical events, such as conflicts or trade disruptions, that increase costs, limit access to imports and exports, and expose supply chains.

These risks underline a critical truth: Australia’s food security is inseparable from that of our near region. As a safe and reliable food supplier, Australia has an indispensable role in maintaining Indo-Pacific stability. The discussion paper supporting the National Food Security Strategy refers to this as a “whole-of-system” consideration. It is our view that this significantly understates its importance.

Regional food security must be elevated from a “consideration” to a central priority for the strategy to succeed.

## 1. Principles

We endorse the four guiding principles identified in the discussion paper: (i) whole-of-food-system, (ii) collaborative, (iii) ambitious and forward-looking, and (iv) outcomes-based and practical. To these, we propose five additional principles:

### 1.1. Production of Knowledge and Capacity Building

Building producer resilience depends on people who support food producers. A strategy must invest in the next generation of scientists, extension officers, policy advisors, and

policymakers, both domestically and globally. This is a key need in the Indo-Pacific region. Technical advances will only endure if matched by institutional capability, sound policies, and human leadership. CFFS training and mentoring programs demonstrate how capacity building strengthens the long-term resilience of food production systems.

## **1.2. Expanded Partnerships for progress in our Region**

Regional partnerships are strategic assets. Australia's neighbours face persistent food insecurity, worsened by climate change, unsound policies and fragile supply chains. Failure to address these handicaps risks instability at our doorstep. Australia has the potential to reduce those risks, but its influence is budget-constrained.

A further consideration is that Australia relies on food imports from the near region, even though the country exports around 70% of its agricultural production. This headline figure masks key vulnerabilities, such as seafood, where approximately 66% of what Australians consume is imported. The value of these imports is roughly double that of our seafood exports, with 70–80% sourced from the Indo-Pacific. This reliance underscores the importance of strong relationships with neighbouring countries: supporting their domestic food security and political stability directly underpins Australia's capacity to secure critical food imports.

## **1.3. Food security must be treated as a pillar of national security.**

We recommend that DAFF, supported by DFAT, Austrade, ACIAR, CSIRO, and Export Finance Australia, lead the development of a dedicated regional food security, trade, and investment strategy. This should be adequately resourced and aligned with frameworks such as the *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*.

While the key priority areas selected in this discussion paper are those for which the Commonwealth has primary responsibility, any national food security strategy will also need to engage the State and Territory governments.

## **1.4. Leading Regional Integration**

Australia's strategy should aim to strengthen regional food market integration by deepening Indo-Pacific cooperation in agriculture, trade, and investment. This would shorten supply chains and make them less vulnerable to external shocks in other parts of the world. A co-design approach to solving regional problems and empowering local communities is recommended.

## **1.5. Evidence-based Policy Design and Implementation**

Policy must be evidence-based, backed by research and innovation that draws on both scientific and Indigenous knowledge. Long-term investment in international agricultural

R&D, institutional capability, and governance is essential. Australia has a trusted track record in this regard. Its benefits to both Australia and its developing partner countries are well understood and appreciated in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Timeframes

We envisage a tiered approach to achieving food security:

- Short-term (1–2 years): to respond to more immediate food system issues such as biosecurity readiness, food relief pathways, and targeted capacity building.
- Medium-term (5–10 years): to respond to longer-term food system issues such as improving the sustainability and resilience of agricultural systems, building institutional capability, workforce and policy development, and regional partnerships.
- Long-term (10 plus years): If the short-term and medium-term objectives are achieved, Australia will continue to be seen as a trusted partner in the development of food systems globally, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. New opportunities will emerge from the earlier activities.

## 2. Examples of Current and Planned Crawford Fund for Food Security (CFFS) Initiatives

The CFFS is engaged in various initiatives that directly support national and regional food security. These focus on building human capacity, strengthening partnerships, and applying research for impact in Australia and the Indo-Pacific.

**CFFS initiatives are designed to deliver both domestic benefits and regional stability.** By investing in people, partnerships, and applied research, these activities strengthen Australia's food security while reinforcing resilience and trust in the wider global community.

### 2.1. Biosecurity Preparedness and Regional Partnerships

- CFFS supports collaborative biosecurity training programs in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, equipping scientists, quarantine officers, farmers and policymakers to anticipate and respond to plant and animal disease threats.
- These programs reduce the risk of incursions into Australia and simultaneously build resilience in neighbouring countries. They are a model of shared security where Australian investment in the region protects Australia's own food supply.

## **2.2. Training the Next Generation of Food System Leaders**

- Through Master Classes, international training, and fellowship programs, CFFS develops the skills of young scientists, extension officers, and policy specialists in Australia and partner countries. We intend to expand our flagship Master Classes in research leadership and management to develop stronger partnerships between Australian and international agencies to deliver joint project outcomes.
- Our experience could be harnessed for initiatives recommended here, and could include a National Food Security Fellowship Program. We can readily link with regional training networks to ensure that Australia and its neighbours improve their leadership capacities for managing future shocks.

## **2.3. Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Agriculture**

- CFFS masterclasses and capacity-building activities in areas such as implementation of sustainable intensification, soil and water management, and agrobiodiversity help producers and institutions adapt to climate change, reduce emissions, and strengthen resilience.
- These efforts provide practical pathways for Australian and regional partners to move towards more climate-resilient food systems. They could also be expanded with additional funding.

## **2.4. Nutrition and Health Outcomes**

- CFFS supports research and training collaborations focusing on nutrient-dense crops, dietary diversity, and food safety opportunities.
- These initiatives aim to increase the quantity of food available and improve its quality, supporting better nutrition outcomes for communities in Australia and across the Indo-Pacific.

## **2.5. Knowledge Diplomacy and Trade Stability**

- The Fund promotes knowledge diplomacy, using agricultural research and innovation as a bridge to strengthen Australia's trade and diplomatic relationships.
- Our experience and networks can be leveraged to embed food security priorities in Australia's regional engagement strategies and align better with the *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* and other trade frameworks.

## 2.6. The Crawford Fund for Food Security Annual Conference

Our Annual Conference in Canberra is Australia’s leading forum linking science, policy, and partnerships to turn evidence into action on food security at home and across the globe.

In 2024, the conference focused on *Food and Nutrition Security: Transformative Partnerships, Local Leadership, and Co-Design*. It highlighted that technical innovation alone is insufficient without local ownership and strong institutions. Case studies from Papua New Guinea and Indonesia demonstrated how co-designed partnerships can deliver practical, trusted solutions, while the participation of young scholars and early-career professionals ensured capacity building for the next generation.

The theme for 2025 was Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems. The conference stressed the urgency of adapting food systems to climate change, balancing productivity with sustainability and equity. Outcomes included actionable recommendations for policymakers, a journalism award that amplified community–science collaboration, and a “Listeners’ Report” distilling key policy lessons.

Together, these conferences demonstrate the Fund’s role as a convener and catalyst—providing evidence, sharing lived experience, and strengthening Australia’s reputation as a trusted partner in shaping food security solutions at home and across the region.

## 3. Priority Areas

The discussion paper identifies three priority areas as follows

### 3.1. Resilient Supply Chains

Resilience goes beyond logistics. It requires systems that can anticipate, adapt to, and recover from shocks. COVID-19 and geopolitical volatility highlight the risks of over-reliance on the markets of just one or two countries.

Australia must:

- integrate regional and domestic biosecurity training and response mechanisms;
- strengthen Indo-Pacific integration through more-reliable supply chains; and
- dismantle intra-regional trade barriers in a coordinated way, while also seeking lower trade barriers between the world’s major regions.

The Crawford Fund’s partnerships in the Pacific and Southeast Asia provide a proven model of collaborative resilience.

### **3.2. Productivity, Innovation, and Economic Growth**

Research underpins productivity growth. Addressing today's challenges requires sustained investments in:

- agriculture and food R4D training and capability building;
- improving the effectiveness of institutions and governance; and
- Indigenous and community-led enterprises as drivers of innovation.

Innovation must be socially trusted and environmentally sustainable to deliver lasting benefits.

### **3.3. Competition and Cost of Living**

Food affordability is a pressing domestic concern in many countries. The strategy should link affordability to sustainable production, reduced waste, and market reform. In the long term, resilient systems, trusted supply chains, and sound policies are the best insurance against rising food costs.

## **4. Whole-of-System Considerations**

As stated above, CFFS strongly believes that the “whole-of-system” considerations identified have a greater significance than that implied in the Discussion Paper. For Australia's National Food Security Strategy to succeed, regional food security must be elevated from a “consideration” to a central or core priority.

### **4.1. Climate Change and Sustainability**

Climate change threatens yields, nutritional quality, livestock, and fisheries. Investment in sustainable intensification, biodiversity protection, and adaptation is vital. Building Australia's capability in climate-resilient agriculture should be a core strategic action. CFFS training in the implementation of sustainable agriculture demonstrates practical pathways.

### **4.2. People**

Food security is about people as much as products. Building the technical and management skills, leadership, and confidence of individuals and communities is as important as producing food itself. A strategy that invests in people alongside production will deliver resilience that endures. We recommend that the government consider introducing a national food security fellowship program, linked to regional training, to develop more and better future leaders in Australia and the Indo-Pacific.



### **4.3. Health and Nutrition**

Nutrition must be central to the strategy. Research partnerships can deliver not only more food but better food. Acknowledging Australia's expertise, priorities would include, but not be limited to, nutrient-dense crops, dietary diversity, and food safety. Research partnerships can deliver not only more food, but better food. By investing in research for development, Australia can ensure that food systems contribute to improved health outcomes as well as national resilience.

### **4.4. Trade and Market Access**

Australia's food security relies on stable international trade. Knowledge diplomacy, linking agricultural research, innovation, and standards with trade, can reinforce market stability and strengthen regional trust.

### **4.5. National and Regional Security**

Food security should be understood as a nontraditional security challenge directly relevant to Australia's defence and strategic posture. A food-insecure world risks instability, coercion, and external influence. Ensuring regional food security, therefore, contributes not only to development outcomes but also to the stability of Australia's strategic environment.

Food security is national security. The Indo-Pacific contains half the world's undernourished people. A food-insecure region is vulnerable to instability, coercion, and external influence. Australia's long-standing agricultural partnerships are strategic assets that can be built upon to strengthen regional resilience.

### **4.6. Emerging Challenges – Future Food Security**

Future food security has challenges on many fronts, shaped by pressures that are technological, environmental, social, and geopolitical.

A central challenge to food security lies in the rapid pace of urbanisation, both within Australia and across the globe. As populations concentrate in cities, dietary demands are shifting towards more diverse, nutrient-dense foods while supply systems come under mounting pressure. Meeting these evolving needs requires new approaches: intensive peri-urban fruit and vegetable production, supported by efficient, lower-cost supply chains, offers a way to improve access to balanced and healthy diets. This is especially important for underprivileged communities and time-poor urban populations, who are often the first to feel the strain of rising costs and disrupted supply.

At the same time, agriculture's research and innovation agenda is being reshaped. A good example is the University of Sydney's Agriculture Institute, which has articulated a "3-N" focus—Net-Zero, Nature-Positive, and Nutrition-Balanced—as a framework for future agricultural innovation. These three imperatives capture a broader vision: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, restoring ecosystems, and ensuring better diets. Together, they reflect a growing recognition that food systems must be productive, intensively sustainable, socially trusted, and aligned with long-term environmental goals.

Evidence shows that agriculture, often criticised for its greenhouse gas footprint, can in fact be central to emission reductions. In cropping, for example, boosting yield progress helps limit the need to expand into new land—an activity with extremely high greenhouse gas costs. Modern, well-researched cropping systems that avoid marginal lands deliver the lowest emissions intensity per unit of food at the farm gate. When these systems are managed to sustain soil productivity—avoiding nutrient mining, erosion, or the build-up of pests—they deliver both environmental and production benefits.

The opportunity is clear: agriculture must be reframed not as a liability but as a partner in climate and food system solutions. By adopting innovative practices, cutting emissions, and building resilience throughout supply chains, the sector can contribute significantly to a sustainable future. Equally, a nature-positive approach—emphasising the restoration of healthy ecosystems—will underpin productivity, biodiversity, and the resilience of food systems in the long term.

Australia's food security strategy should be open to these new possibilities. Urbanisation, climate change, and shifting consumer expectations present challenges, but they also create opportunities to align agricultural practice, research, and policy with a more sustainable and equitable food future. Viewing agriculture as part of the solution is the first step toward turning those opportunities into progress.

Australia's food security strategy must be open to these new possibilities and see them as opportunities for progress.

## 5. Conclusion

Australia cannot achieve food security in isolation. A well-fed world is a stable world, and a well-fed Indo-Pacific is a stable Indo-Pacific: hunger and malnutrition fuel instability and vulnerability.

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By elevating regional food security to the centre of Australia’s national strategy, and by investing in people, partnerships, and research here and in our neighbours, Australia can safeguard its own future while reinforcing regional resilience and growth.

As successive reports have reminded us, food unites, while hunger divides. It is the basis of cultural development, trade and exchange.

The Crawford Fund for Food Security stands ready to work with DAFF and the National Food Council to design and implement a strategy that embraces these ideas and secures national and regional prosperity.

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