

FOOD FOR ALL – SECURING THE FUTURE
SWAN HILL FORUM, Monday 13th July 2009

Mr Luke Donnellan MP,
Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier

Congratulations to Mayor Cr Greg Cruickshank and Swan Hill Council for hosting this important event in partnership with VicHealth. Thank you for the invitation to open this forum and to announce a new advocacy body today.

As a food producing region, it is fitting to have this forum in Swan Hill. I am told that Swan Hill Council, its officers, workers and other committed individuals have given strong and active support to the *Food for All* Program over the last four years.

Today we welcome diverse participants to discuss the challenges facing the food system.

- We recognize that for each and every one of us, healthy eating is one of the main supports of our health throughout our lives.
- We recognize that that a good and equitable food system is necessary for the mental and physical health and well-being of all Australians.
- We recognize that we are collectively responsible for ensuring that we have a good food system

Timeliness

It is timely to have this forum with the theme of Securing the Future this year. Some national and global factors that contribute to the need to rethink the resiliency of our food supply include:

- Convergent events such as last year's global shortage of food, which resulted in 30 countries stopping exporting food and in global food price hikes climate change, in particular drought in Victoria . Projected population increases, globally and in Victoria
- The updating of the Australian Dietary Guidelines
- The recently released Victorian Aboriginal Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy
- The soon-to-be-released report by the National Preventative Health Task Force.

Having an adequate, affordable and safe supply of nutritious food from non-emergency sources is important for all of us, irrespective of where we live and how old we are. This is also known as 'food security'. Although Victoria is Australia's largest exporter of food and its annual exports are valued at over \$5.6 billion, in the context of challenges globally and nationally, it is timely to study more closely what food will be available into the future to maintain healthy and productive communities .

Systems-wide approach

It is interesting to note that VicHealth has progressed the focus of its work from working with individuals and groups to promote healthy eating to broadening its attention to promote the resiliency of food supply systems. Unless there is an adequate supply of nutritious food for healthy eating, simply encouraging people to eat well will be in vain.

Learnings from practice to research and research to practice

As part of this system-wide approach, the *Food for All* Program has been working with six local government authorities to improve food security and access to food for healthy eating. At the same time VicHealth is evaluating implemented strategies, as will be presented by Dr Meg Montague. The Foundation has identified gaps in knowledge and funded researchers from diverse disciplines to find more evidence as a guide to ensuring our ability to continue to have an adequate supply of nutritious food. We will have an opportunity to hear about some of the funded research today.

We are fortunate to have Dr Alice Ammerman here to share her work from her research in North Carolina exploring the connections between 'eating local' and potential impacts on obesity, the environment and the economic viability of communities.

Theory is one thing, and practice another. In this fourth annual Food for All Forum, there is opportunity for sharing what we have learnt between practitioners and researchers from hard-won experience in many different settings led by the VicHealth funded six Food for All participating local governments (Brimbank City Council, City of Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong City Council, Melton Shire Council, Wodonga City Council and Swan Hill Rural City Council).

Some of the questions that will be discussed to-day include:

- The relationship between the food supply and the achievement and maintenance of healthy weight and avoidance of chronic illness
- Healthy food is fundamental to a healthy life, but is our food system environmentally, socially and economically resilient?
- What impact is the drought, planning laws, changes in land use, economics and the financial downturn having on our food system?
- The importance of 'culture' in relation to food .

Launch

As part of the strategy to address some of the identified issues, VicHealth has funded the Food Policy Coalition, which I have the pleasure to announce today.

The successful team is from the Food Policy Unit of Deakin University led by Associate Professor Mark Lawrence, Professor Boyd Swinburn, Professor Danuta Mendelson and Dr Cate Burns. The aims of the Coalition are to identify, analyse and advocate for evidence-based policies and regulatory reform to enable sustainable food security and healthy eating in the Victorian population.

Dr Burns will expand on the work of this Coalition later today. We look forward to hearing from Dr Burns this afternoon.

In closing

We are collectively at a crossroads in finding a way forward through the imperatives of our time – drought, climate change, global warming, and pandemics, all of which have enormous potential to affect the food chain and the health and well-being of all human beings, plants and animals.

Congratulations to all of you who have been part of this discussion and engagement.

I am delighted to open this very important and timely conference – *"Food for All – Securing the future."*