



Victorian Government
response to the
**Inquiry into securing the
Victorian food supply**

VICTORIA

A photograph of a worker wearing a straw hat and a purple shirt, standing on a blue and orange scissor lift. The worker is in a large greenhouse, surrounded by rows of tomato plants. The plants are covered in green and red tomatoes. The greenhouse has a high ceiling with a metal frame and a large circular fan. A bright blue diagonal graphic element is on the left side of the page.

Acknowledgement of Country

We proudly acknowledge Victoria's Traditional Owners and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture.

We recognise the diversity of Victoria's Traditional Owners in being distinctive communities with their own set of laws, customs and processes built upon tens of thousands of years of knowledge. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners' lands and waters on which we live and work and pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

Authorised by the Victorian Government

1 Treasury Place, Melbourne 3002

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Introduction

The Victorian Government maintains a strong commitment to delivering the improved outcomes identified by the Committee to secure Victoria's food supply.

Protecting productive agricultural land has been a long-standing policy commitment of the Victorian Government. This commitment is supported by planning controls that prioritise non-urban land uses in rural areas, particularly agriculture, over incompatible urban uses. These controls recognise the vital role agricultural land plays in supporting Victoria's food supply, economy and regional sustainability.

Victoria's rural communities depend on productive agricultural land for their economic, social, and environmental wellbeing. Ensuring this land remains available for agricultural uses underpins the long-term sustainability of these communities.

Plan for Victoria retains Melbourne's urban growth boundary and proposes defined settlement boundaries for Victoria's regional cities and towns. This strategic direction limits outward urban expansion and protects agricultural land across Victoria.

The *Parliamentary Inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply* examined how Victoria can secure its food supply into the future. The report found that demand for the fresh fruit and vegetables is increasing as the state's population grows. However, urban encroachment into farmland is making it more difficult and expensive to grow food close to Victorian cities. The Committee's final report contained 33 recommendations aimed at addressing these issues for future generations of Victorians.

The Victorian Government supports 29 of the Committee's recommendations either in full, in principle, or in part and has advanced several programs and initiatives since the report's release in November 2024, including:

- Providing expert advice and access to land use data through the Victorian Land Use Information System and mapping.
- Progressing the *Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges Action Plan 2024*, including providing a progress update on the planning website.
- Supporting organisations to deliver Pop-up Food Relief Markets across metropolitan Melbourne.
- The garinga djimbayang Grant Program delivered under the Agriculture College Modernisation Program.
- A \$5.5 million Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund in 2022-2024 to support students transition into agricultural careers, and a \$250,000 grant in 2024-25 to the Community Grocer to provide fresh fruit and vegetables at an affordable price to people living in social housing.
- Supporting the Regional Planning Hub program to deliver on the ground capability and capacity with rural and regional councils.
- Delivering career education initiatives and industry engagement opportunities through the School to Work program.

Victoria's food supply

Recommendation 1

That the Victorian Government develop a whole-of-government Victorian Food System Strategy. The strategy must address the food system as a whole (including agriculture, processing, manufacturing, supply and consumption). It should be centred on access to adequate, nutritious food as a human right and a determinant of health. The strategy should aim to:

- **Secure Victoria's supply of healthy, locally grown food, in the long-term.**
- **Strengthen the resilience of Victoria's food system to shocks and stressors by promoting diversity across the system, decentralising and localising supply chains.**
- **Promote regenerative and sustainable food production.**
- **Support Victorian farmers and food manufacturers to build profitable businesses and expand healthy food production.**
- **Map major food producing regions and protect all agricultural land from inappropriate development.**
- **Build food systems literacy across government departments and local government.**

The strategy must also set measurable targets, clearly attribute responsibility for achieving these targets and include a transparent monitoring framework.

RESPONSE: UNDER REVIEW

The Government is committed to securing access to healthy, locally grown food and ensuring the resilience, sustainability and long-term viability of the food system. It recognises that food is a key determinant of health and wellbeing, and that equitable access to nutritious food is a foundational goal of public policy.

The Government will consider the development of a Victorian Food System Strategy that:

- takes a whole-of-government approach spanning agriculture, manufacturing, processing, distribution and access
- promotes sustainable and regenerative food production practices
- supports diverse, decentralised and resilient supply chains
- protects productive agricultural land and identifies major food-producing regions
- improves food systems literacy across all levels of government
- sets measurable targets, assigns clear accountability, and includes a transparent monitoring and reporting framework.

This work would build upon existing strategies, including:

- *Victoria's Economic Growth Statement* which identifies agribusiness as a key priority sector for the state, demonstrating a clear commitment to the entire value chain, from primary production through to processing and manufacturing.
- *Strong, Innovative, Sustainable: A New Strategy for Agriculture in Victoria* provides grants and other supports which help Victorian businesses across the agribusiness sector to build

resilience and modernise through innovation.

- *Made in Victoria 2030: Manufacturing Statement* identifies strategic priorities for food manufacturing, including growing Victoria's sustainable, innovative and advanced food manufacturing capability.
- Victoria's Regional Economic Development Strategies identify agriculture and food manufacturing industries for development and key contributors to economic output and exports.

The Government remains committed to working in partnership with industry, local government, communities and trading partners to ensure Victoria's food system is secure, sustainable and delivers positive health, economic and environmental outcomes into the future.

Recommendation 2

That the Victorian Government consider establishing a Minister for Food with responsibility for the Victorian food system in its entirety (including agriculture, food processing, manufacturing, supply and consumption). The Minister should coordinate the development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy.

The Victorian Government also establish a Victorian Food System Council to support a Minister for Food to coordinate the development and implementation of a Victorian Food System Strategy. The Council should include representation from across the food system, including:

- **state and local government**
- **farmers and agricultural sector peak bodies**
- **food processing and manufacturing businesses**
- **supply chain businesses**
- **community food enterprises, including food relief agencies.**

RESPONSE: UNDER REVIEW

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring ministerial accountability for securing Victoria's food supply.

Responsibility is shared across existing ministerial portfolios including Agriculture, Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Treasury, Health, Local Government, Skills and TAFE, Planning, Ports and Freight, Regional Development, and Economic Growth and Jobs.

These portfolios provide their expertise and ensure specific food-related matters are effectively addressed holistically.

Introducing a new Minister for Food may overlap established responsibilities and introduce additional complexity, rather than enhance support.

The Government will continue to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and oversight to ensure an integrated and effective approach to food system policy and planning. This includes:

- enhancing existing governance mechanisms to improve information-sharing and accountability across portfolios
- working closely with the food relief sector and other stakeholders to inform policy development and delivery
- considering further opportunities to improve coordination and leadership across government on food security and system resilience.

The Government remains committed to ensuring strong, coordinated leadership across the food system to support secure, sustainable and equitable access to food for all Victorians.

Population growth and urban sprawl

Recommendation 3

That Agriculture Victoria update the analysis of agricultural land use trends contained in *Strategic agricultural land and development in Victoria (2020)* using the latest Victorian Land Use Information System data. The updated land use analysis must focus on changes to agricultural land uses in peri-urban areas. This analysis should be provided to the new Minister for Food, the Minister for Planning, the Department of Transport and Planning and made publicly available.

That Agriculture Victoria maintain the currency of the Victorian Land Use Information System with annual data collections.

That Agriculture Victoria expand its Planning and Advisory Service to include:

- **providing local governments with mapping and analysis of agricultural land uses and trends in their municipality, upon request**
- **delivering biennial reports on agricultural land use trends (with a focus on quantifying the extent and rate of farmland loss to urban uses) to the Minister for Food and the Minister for Planning.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

The Government supports updating *Strategic agricultural land and development in Victoria (2020)* (SALAD). This includes generating additional data to understand land use changes such as new housing to ensure alignment with reforms outlined in *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land action plan (2024)* (Action Plan).

The Government supports maintaining the currency of the Victorian Land Use Information System with annual data collections, subject to the availability of sufficient information and resources.

The Government supports and assists local government planners with their mapping and analysis through the provision of data, tools and advice. Agriculture Victoria will continue to provide expert advice and access to land use data through the Victorian Land Use Information System and mapping.

The Government supports the reporting of agricultural land use trends with a focus on quantifying the extent and rate of farmland loss to urban uses. Biennial reporting timeframes should match data collection timeframes. An increased timeframe between reports is suitable, given land use change trends are typically measured over decades to provide a better understanding of regional and statewide changes.

Protecting agricultural land

Recommendation 4

That the Department of Transport and Planning provide regular progress updates on the implementation of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land: Action plan 2024*. Updates on each action should be published on the Department's website each year in March until all actions are implemented (commencing March 2025). Updates should be detailed, outlining the steps taken to implement each action to date and the work left to do.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports continuing to publish annual updates as actions are progressed. In March 2025, the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) updated the green wedges planning webpage to specify that the Action Plan will be progressed alongside the Government responses to the recommendations of this Inquiry to align timing and policy outcomes.

Recommendation 5

That the Victorian Government ensure that updates to the State Planning Policy Framework undertaken as part of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land: Action plan 2024*:

- **Strengthen the planning policy imperative for protecting all agricultural land from inappropriate development to secure Victoria's food supply.**
- **Define key policy concepts to improve the interpretability of agricultural policies.**
- **Acknowledge the value of small peri-urban farms, as a source of:**
 - **local food supply and economic activity**
 - **regenerative land management practices**
 - **diversity and resilience in Victoria's food system**
- **encourage innovative farming practices and development which enhances the productivity and viability of farming in peri-urban areas.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government is progressing related reforms under the Action Plan.

The Planning Policy Framework (PPF) will be amended to strengthen protections for all productive agricultural land across Victoria. This will support food security and reduce rural land fragmentation by establishing settlement boundaries to manage growth appropriately.

The Government will remove ambiguous terms like 'strategic significance' and 'economic importance' from agricultural policies in the PPF. All productive agricultural land will be recognised as valuable, and decisions will continue to be guided by integrated decision-making principles.

The PPF will reinforce the value of peri-urban farms for local food supply, economic activity, regenerative practices, and food system resilience. Councils will be supported to reflect this in local policy through planning scheme amendments.

Councils will be directed to encourage innovative and sustainable farming practices through the PPF, including the use of recycled resources like water and biogas, to support viable and productive farming in peri-urban areas.

Recommendation 6

That the Victorian Government:

- **Audit the minimum lot size permitted through subdivision in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone around the state.**
- **Work with local governments around the state to ensure that the minimum lot size permitted through subdivision in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone can support viable agriculture. This may require raising the minimum lot size permitted through subdivision.**
- **Prohibit the subdivision of small lots below the minimum lot size in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone within 100 kilometres of Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports progressing Action 16 of the Action Plan restricting the creation of lots below the minimum lot size (small lots) for existing dwellings to protect all productive agricultural land from fragmentation.

DTP has audited the minimum lot size permitted through subdivisions in the Green Wedge Zone (GWZ), Green Wedge A Zone (GWAZ), Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ), Farming Zone (FZ) and Rural Activity Zone (RAZ) across Victoria. The audit has found half of all created rural lots are small lots and less than 5 hectares.

Councils will be directed through the planning scheme to ensure subdivision controls support viable agribusiness and limit rural land fragmentation, including rural industry, horticulture and large-lot farming.

The Government will prohibit the subdivision of small lots in the specified planning scheme zones across Victoria. A state-wide approach is necessary as one-in-three small lot approvals occur outside of land 100 kilometres of Melbourne, Geelong Ballarat and Bendigo.

Recommendation 7

That the Victorian Government amend the Victorian planning framework to require local government planning approval to build a small second dwelling on a residential property within the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone.

The Victorian Government should also discontinue the VicSmart streamlined pathway for two-lot subdivision in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

A planning permit is always required for a small second dwelling in the GWZ, GWAZ and Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ).

The Victorian Government has specified requirements including land use conditions and setback requirements to safeguard agricultural land from a new small second dwelling (SSD) while balancing the need for more housing in rural areas. The Government does not support requiring a planning permit for a SSD in the FZ and RAZ where these requirements are met.

When this reform was introduced in 2023, the Victorian Government sought to give families the space to grow together, provide a critical second income, or give kids somewhere to stay when they visit for the weekend. These planning controls provide clarity and certainty to ensure SSDs in rural areas remain modest in size and impact. The requirements strike an appropriate balance between addressing the housing crisis, not disadvantaging regional Victoria, and protecting the agricultural viability of land.

The Government supports discontinuing the VicSmart streamlined pathway for two-lot subdivisions in the GWZ, GWAZ, RCZ, FZ or RAZ to ensure landowners arrange and restructure their land to address agricultural issues and the impacts from non-agricultural uses in accordance with state planning policy and the purpose of the zones. Councils have the opportunity to introduce more restrictive subdivision requirements through local planning controls.

Recommendation 8

That the Department of Transport and Planning develop a Planning Practice Note to guide the development of tourism in conjunction with agriculture. The note should assist planners to identify development which enhances food production and to ensure it is appropriately designed and sited to minimise the loss of agricultural land and the impact on neighbouring farms.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports improving the quality and consistency of planning assessments in agricultural areas. New guidance will consider the permissibility of discretionary uses used in conjunction with rural uses, including establishing a clear link between accommodation, tourism offerings and rural uses, to meet the purpose of the zones.

Recommendation 9

That the Victorian Government review and amend the Green Wedge Zone, the Green Wedge A Zone and Rural Conservation Zone to remove all Section 2 uses with no link to the agricultural or environmental objectives of these zones. This should be completed by March 2027.

It should also ensure that the Planning Practice Note for urban-rural interface areas proposed in Action 11 of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural areas: Action plan 2024*:

- **Discourages discretionary uses which have no nexus to the agriculture or environmental values of the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone or the Rural Conservation Zone.**
- **Directs local governments to consider the cumulative impact of all discretionary development across green wedge areas.**

Lastly, it should pilot the application of the new mandatory site coverage, setbacks and building heights for discretionary uses in the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and the Rural Conservation Zone, as per Action 13 of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural areas: Action plan 2024*.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government is introducing land use conditions to prohibit inappropriate exhibition centres, group accommodation, residential hotels and host farms in these zones.

The Government will provide guidance for urban-rural interface areas to detail how green wedge land uses in interface areas align with the non-urban vision and intent of green wedges, support a permanent edge to growth, and consider the cumulative impacts of all discretionary development in green wedge land.

The Red-tape Commissioner's *Planning and Building Approvals Process Review* (2019) recommended consolidation of controls that serve similar purposes, while allowing for local variations to make planning schemes easier to understand, enable better decisions and reduce delays and costs. Mandatory siting requirements are appropriate for built-up urban areas, rather than the less impactful typologies expected in GWZ, GWAZ and RCZ. Siting controls in rural areas are more appropriately applied to protect important rural character and landscapes through planning instruments such as overlays. New requirements for green wedge management plans set a blueprint for councils to ensure planning and built form controls appropriately manage local priorities and conditions for green wedge land.

Recommendation 10

That the Victorian Government work with the Municipal Association of Victoria to enhance the professional development available to all peri-urban, rural and regional local governments. Professional development should be focused on:

- **Enriching their understanding of modern agriculture, including the value of supporting farms of all sizes and business models.**
- **The role of local governments and agriculture in Victoria's broader food system and how effective planning policy and controls can secure future food supply.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports working with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to enable an uplift in peri-urban, rural and regional local government planning capability to understand modern agriculture and farming systems, and the role of effective planning policy and application in securing future food supply.

Agriculture Victoria's Planning and Advisory Service provides training in the form of self-guided courses and has delivered technical content with the MAV and Planning Institute of Australia. Additional training opportunities will support improved awareness of agricultural practices and aid council planning offers in their reporting and determinations.

The Victorian Government partners with MAV on the Regional Partnership Hub Program which builds capability and capacity in rural and regional councils.

Recommendation 11

That the Victorian Government make a strong and unequivocal commitment to maintaining Melbourne's urban growth boundary in the new Plan for Victoria.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

Plan for Victoria confirms Melbourne's urban growth boundary will remain in place and continues to limit the outward expansion of Melbourne, protecting economic and environmental values and providing homes in the right places.

Under section 46AG of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act), any change to the urban growth boundary requires ratification by both houses of Parliament of any amendment to a planning scheme that has the effect of altering or removing any controls over the subdivision of green wedge land to allow the land to be subdivided into more lots or into smaller lots than allowed for in the planning scheme.

Recommendation 12

That the Victorian Government mandates the use of open spaces or medium density residential development in growth areas along Melbourne's urban growth boundary to provide a buffer between urban and green wedge land. It is critical that buffers are incorporated into the metropolitan side of the urban growth boundary and that they do not encroach into green wedge land.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government will develop guidance for urban-rural interface areas to support a permanent edge to growth, progressing Action 11 of the Action Plan. Consistent with the *PSP 2.0 Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines* (2021) and bushfire separation distances, development along the inside edge of the urban growth boundary should remain at lower densities or as open space. The guidance will detail how development can align with the non-urban values of green wedge land, support a permanent edge to growth, and minimise cumulative impacts.

Recommendation 13

That the Victorian Government support local governments to update green wedge management plans which are a decade or more old, by November 2026. Local governments should be required to collaborate where green wedge areas span multiple municipalities.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

Since February 2023, the Victorian Government has required Melbourne's 17 green wedge municipal councils to prepare a plan to manage green wedge land under the Act, if one does not apply to all or part of their municipal district, or if 10 years have elapsed since a copy of the Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP) was provided to the Minister for Planning. The Minister will release a new Ministerial Direction on the preparation and content of GWMPs to give effect to other parts of the legislation.

The Government supports councils collaborating where green wedge areas span multiple municipalities. Before the legislative changes, councils have worked collaboratively to prepare GWMPs for shared green wedge areas, for example, Hobsons Bay City Council and Wyndham City Council producing the Werribee South GWMP. Councils can also benefit from leading the preparation of their own GWMP, particularly where other councils have already recently prepared GWMPs for their own municipal districts.

Recommendation 14

That the Department of Transport and Planning support local governments in green wedge areas to implement green wedge management plans. This should include guidance to update local planning policy and schemes to reflect the aspirations of green wedge management plans, and support for programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing their agricultural and environmental values.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

DTP has dedicated planners and planning support services for each council to develop and implement their GWMPs, including the Regional Planning Hub program.

The Minister for Planning will release a new Ministerial Direction on the preparation and content of GWMPs to require green wedge councils to consult with prescribed stakeholders (including the registered Aboriginal party for the green wedge land, the community of the municipal district and relevant public authorities) and identify and include strategies to protect the non-urban values and non-urban uses in accordance with the Act. The planning webpage has been updated to guide councils on how to implement GWMPs through their planning schemes in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Direction, the *Practitioner's guide to Victoria's planning schemes* and the Act.

Recommendation 15

That the Department of Transport and Planning update Planning Practice Note 31 'Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan' by November 2025. The updated Planning Practice Note should require green wedge management plans to:

- **Be clearly linked to local planning policy and schemes.**
- **Contain specific and measurable actions to enhance the agricultural and environmental values of green wedge areas.**
- **Encourage local governments to identify how they will keep their communities informed of progress to implement green wedge management plans.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

To deliver Action 10 of the Action Plan, the Victorian Government has updated the planning website to provide guidance to assist councils to be consistent with the Ministerial Direction on the preparation and content of GWMPs, and the Act.

Recommendation 16

That the Department of Transport and Planning ensure amendments to the Victorian Planning Provisions strengthen the right to farm (as proposed in Action 7 of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land: Action plan 2024*) by:

- **Clarifying that lawful agriculture is a protected activity in all zones which enable farming, regardless of the presence of competing urban uses.**
- **Protecting lawful agriculture from the complaints of urban landholders already situated in peri-urban farming areas.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports changes to the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) to strengthen the right to farm. In reviewing Action 7 of the Action Plan, the Government will ensure these changes require a permit for accommodation and education centres near farmland to minimise land use conflict across Victoria, not just land within 100 kilometres of Melbourne. Applicants will need to demonstrate the proposal is suitably designed and located to not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture.

The Environment Protection Authority is responsible for managing nuisance complaints in rural areas, including requirements set out in publication *1819.1 Agriculture – guide to preventing harm to people and the environment*. Under section 107 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, councils are responsible for developing and maintaining a complaints policy, including processes to manage complaints. The Act allows affected members of the public to object to an amendment or permit. Members of the community can write to their local council or elected officials, such as Ministers or Members of Parliament, about their concerns.

Recommendation 17

That the Department of Transport and Planning review the efficacy of amendments to the Victorian Planning Provisions implemented as part of Action 7 of the *Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural lands: Action plan 2024*. The review should be conducted two years after the reforms are implemented. The Department should consider whether right to farm legislation is needed to supplement these reforms and the key learnings of similar legislation in other national and international jurisdictions.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of right to farm planning reforms, including a comprehensive review within two years. The Government will consider the experiences and key learnings from similar international and national jurisdictions as part of this review process. Changes to the VPP are the first step in minimising the potential for further land use conflict by preventing incompatible land uses from locating near farmland.

Recommendation 18

That the peri-urban local governments of Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo appoint agricultural officers.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government acknowledges local councils need sufficient resources and policy direction to have the capability and capacity to manage rural issues.

The Government continues to support the Regional Planning Hub program in partnership with MAV to build on the ground capability and capacity with rural and regional councils.

The Government will continue to work alongside agencies to support local councils appoint resources for specific areas.

Agricultural covenants

Recommendation 19

That the Victorian Government work with Trust for Nature and the agricultural sector to develop and implement an agricultural covenant pilot program. The program should:

- **Encompass a diverse variety of farms, representative of the broader sector.**
- **Be focused on designing agricultural covenants which are practical, not overly prescriptive and flexible enough to accommodate changing farming practices.**
- **Be informed by key learnings from the well-established system of conservation easements in the United States.**
- **Identify barriers to the statewide rollout of agricultural covenants and how they could be overcome.**

RESPONSE: NOT SUPPORTED

The Victorian Government supports the protection and sustainable use of agricultural land but does not support the use of agricultural covenants as the preferred mechanism for achieving this outcome.

The planning scheme remains the most effective and flexible tool for protecting agricultural land in Victoria. Planning zones and overlays are already in place to guide land use and development in rural areas and allow for adaptive responses to changing agricultural practices and emerging challenges, such as climate change and land fragmentation.

While Trust for Nature has previously explored a pilot program involving voluntary 'farm covenants', these were designed with a conservation focus under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. This purpose is not well aligned with the objectives of supporting productive agriculture. Trust for Nature's legislative mandate centres on conservation outcomes, which may conflict with the broader and dynamic needs of agricultural businesses.

The Government recognises the intent of the recommendation to explore innovative tools to support sustainable agriculture. However, efforts are best focused on strengthening planning frameworks, supporting sustainable land management through incentive-based programs, and working with the agricultural sector to build resilience, productivity and environmental stewardship.

Recommendation 20

That the Victorian Government work with Trust for Nature to:

- **Amend its criteria for properties eligible to be covenanted to better capture a diverse range of farmland.**
- **Incentivise farmers to participate in an agricultural covenant program. This should be informed by the incentives for agricultural easements offered in the concessions or other support for working farms.**
- **Consideration should also be given to how incentives could be offered on a more permanent basis if the pilot program is a success. United States and may include exemptions from council rates, tax concessions or other support for working farms. Consideration should also be given to how incentives could be offered on a more permanent basis if the pilot program is a success.**

RESPONSE: NOT SUPPORTED

The Trust for Nature model is focused on conservation on private land rather than preservation of land for agricultural purposes and the relevant legislation does not support this model.

Supporting farmers to feed Victoria

Recommendation 21

That Agriculture Victoria ensure that all its programs, initiatives and grants acknowledge the importance of small-to-medium sized farms to food supply and the resilience of the agricultural sector. It must ensure they can access funding and other support offered wherever possible and appropriate, regardless of their location in a metropolitan, regional or rural municipality.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) designs and delivers programs, initiatives and grants that are tailored to the Victorian Government's priorities and the specific needs of the sector.

A resilient agriculture sector requires farms of all different types and sizes. As such, these programs are developed with the importance of a diverse sector that includes farms of different sizes and types as a key consideration.

Ensuring that different cohorts participate is also a focus where possible and appropriate. While there are some initiatives that may be more targeted such as regionally specific sector conditions or to address a specific issue, programs and initiatives are generally available to all agricultural businesses regardless of their size or location.

Recommendation 22

That the Victorian Government revise the *Ministerial guidelines for differential rating* (2013) to encourage local governments to apply differential rates to farmland. The revised guidelines should:

- **Emphasise the importance of viable agriculture to food supply.**
- **Describe the impact of inappropriately high rates on agricultural businesses.**
- **Require local governments to consider the productive value of farmland when setting differential rates.**
- **Encourage local governments to apply a differential rate to farmland which is lower than the general rate.**
- **Provide guidance of what constitutes an effective differential rate.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The *Ministerial Guidelines for Differential Rating* (2013) stipulate that farmland is appropriate for consideration of differential rating.

In accordance with the Government's response to the Final Report of the 2020 Local Government Rating System Review, the Government considers local governments must take responsibility for their own rating decisions and levels in accordance with the needs their own community (including the use of differential rating), reflecting their obligations as a distinct and essential tier of government.

Recommendation 23

That the Victorian Government support the Victorian Schools Garden Program to:

- **Continue offering grants, awards, professional development, incursions and excursions which engage students and teachers with gardening.**
- **Maintain its 'Branch out program'.**
- **Develop additional programs which promote Victorian agriculture and careers in the sector, for example, school farms.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the VSGA with a yearly grant to bring gardening skills and outdoor learning to students in Victorian schools. This will continue through the existing service agreement.

The Government supports in-principle the promotion of Victorian agriculture and careers in the sector and delivers career education initiatives such as Vocational Tasters, Morrisby Career Profiles, support for access to, and promotion of, VET Delivered to School Students Agriculture pathways and industry engagement opportunities through the Department's School to Work program.

Recommendation 24

That the Victorian Government fully implement the Future of Agriculture Training Review recommendations.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government has funded a range of targeted grants that collectively have supported implementation of the Future of Agriculture Training Review recommendations. This includes:

- The Agriculture College Modernisation Program, comprising:
 - Agriculture TAFE Training Fund for training organisations to design and deliver high-quality, modern and flexible training programs that support students into careers in agriculture.
 - Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund for Victorian secondary schools to deliver the agriculture skills of the future by supporting students to transition into modern careers in agriculture.
- The garinga djimbayang Program supporting First Nations and TAFE partnerships to embed Aboriginal traditional knowledge and practices in accredited agriculture training and delivering a communications program recognising First Nations peoples' connection to agriculture through self-determined story telling.
 - Farm Business Resilience Program to deliver informal training, workshops and resources to enhance farmer resilience and capacity to manage risk and adapt to changing conditions.
 - College Fund for three agricultural colleges to build new student accommodation.
- Regional and Specialist Training Fund.
- Workforce Skill Set Fund.
- Workforce Training Innovation Fund.

Recommendation 25

That Agriculture Victoria continue its workforce development programs, including initiatives aimed at:

- **Preparing new entrants for a career in agriculture.**
- **Up-skilling the existing agricultural workforce to address emerging challenges and opportunities.**
- **Mentoring early career farmers to take up leadership positions.**

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government delivers the following workforce development programs:

- Upskill and Invest Scholarships that are awarded annually to eligible young farmers, providing up to \$10,000 per scholarship to support training and equipment purchases on farm.
- The Victorian Rural Women's Network providing women working in agriculture with leadership development opportunities.
- The garinga djimbayang program providing grants and developing communications focused on recognising First Nations people's connection with agriculture.
- Accelerating the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) agricultural workforce project, delivering regional and industry activities to increase CALD employment in the sector.
- The Farm Business Resilience Program, co-funded with the Commonwealth Government under the Future Drought Fund, building knowledge and skills of farmer owners, managers, employees and new entrants to improve farm business management. This includes delivery of tailored courses, activities and Young Farmer Business Bootcamps.

Recommendation 26

That the Victorian Government consider working with the agricultural sector to design and trial a shared equity fund to support farmers to purchase farmland (modelled on the Victorian Homebuyers Fund). The fund should support experienced farmers to establish a new farm or extend an existing farm business. It should be available to farmers in rural, regional and peri-urban areas. This should not include 'hobby' or 'lifestyle' farmers.

The Victorian Government consider working with the agricultural sector to promote long-term leasing arrangements for farmland, including farm-shares and lease-to-buy arrangements. This should include the development of template lease agreements, consideration of financial incentives to promote uptake, and exploration of mechanisms to promote leasing opportunities.

This should be informed by international approaches to farmland leasing arrangements.

The Victorian Government also provide financial incentives and support to Victorian farmers (in rural, regional and peri-urban areas) to adopt new agricultural technologies which expands food production or enhances their climate resilience.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

The Victorian Government supports alternative ways to access land beyond ownership. Further work is required to understand the appropriate role for the government in supporting alternative pathways to farm ownership (beyond inheritance or traditional approaches to purchasing land) and to develop and implement a response.

The Government does not support a shared equity scheme for farmland. To avoid adverse outcomes, shared equity schemes require a limited scope and strict eligibility requirements. Making available a shared equity fund across the broad criteria recommended is unlikely to create the benefit sought and instead negatively impact land prices.

The Government provides financial incentives to farmers to encourage early adoption of new agricultural technologies or infrastructure to enhance climate resilience and demonstrate the benefits of specific technologies that in turn support wider sector uptake. Agriculture Victoria provides different programs and services, including programs such as the Farm Business Resilience program, to support Victorian farmers to gain the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding of different technologies and their role in improving food production and climate resilience.

Recommendation 27

That Agriculture Victoria work with the Victorian Farmers Federation, PrimeSafe and commercial abattoirs to negotiate small livestock producers' ongoing access to kill facilities in the short-to-medium term.

The Victorian Government amend the *Meat Industry Act 1993 (Vic)* to specifically provide for and define micro-abattoirs and the Victorian Planning Provisions to introduce micro-abattoirs (including mobile micro-abattoirs) as a Section 1 use in the Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Green Wedge Zone and the Green Wedge A Zone.

The Victorian Government support small scale livestock producers to establish micro-abattoirs (including mobile micro-abattoirs) in communities which can demonstrate a need for this critical shared agricultural infrastructure.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government supports the recommendation to enhance access to kill facilities and support the establishment of micro-abattoirs for small-scale livestock producers.

Agriculture Victoria will continue to work with the Victorian Farmers Federation, PrimeSafe, commercial abattoirs and other stakeholders to facilitate small producers' ongoing access to appropriate processing facilities in the short to medium term.

The Government will amend the VPP to make it easier to establish micro-abattoirs in appropriate rural and regional areas. Micro-abattoirs (including mobile models) will be a Section 1 use in the FZ, RAZ and GWZ. Micro-abattoirs will remain prohibited in the GWAZ, consistent with the zone's purpose to protect the amenity of rural living areas. All facilities will remain subject to appropriate regulatory requirements to safeguard public health, environmental values and community amenity.

The current definition of an abattoir under the *Meat Industry Act 1993* already encompasses micro-abattoirs and enables PrimeSafe to license them. A legislative amendment is not required to support micro-abattoirs.

The Government is committed to supporting small-scale producers and communities seeking to establish micro-abattoirs where there is a clear need. Agriculture Victoria has developed tailored support tools to assist with planning and regulatory approvals, including a micro-abattoir eGuide released in December 2024.

These planning reforms and support measures are expected to be delivered in 2025, strengthening Victoria's local processing capacity and supporting regional agricultural communities.

Recommendation 28

That Agriculture Victoria monitor the distribution of livestock exchanges across the state and advise the Victorian Government if it identifies that consolidation in the sector is beginning to have a negative impact on Victorian farmers.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

Agriculture Victoria works in partnership with livestock producers, relevant industry associations, farming communities, and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to monitor and understand industry risks due to livestock exchange consolidation.

A resilient food system

Recommendation 29

That Agriculture Victoria develop an education program, workshops, online resources and networking opportunities to encourage Victorian farmers to transition to regenerative agricultural practices.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports sustainable agriculture and the benefits it delivers to farming systems and the environment more broadly. Through DEECA (Agriculture Victoria) the Government provides education programs, workshops, online resources and networking opportunities that support improved environmental and productivity outcomes and build sustainability. These tools support farmers to decide how sustainable farming methods best suit their business.

Recommendation 30

That the Victorian Government review *Recycling Victoria: A new economy policy* (2020) to identify opportunities to integrate agriculture, particularly in peri-urban regions, into the circular economy.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

The Victorian Government supports greater integration of agriculture into the circular economy. Current initiatives promote circular economy practices in the agriculture sector, including:

- Partnerships with research institutions and industry to reduce food waste and promote reuse and recycling along the agricultural supply chain.
- Targeted funding to Foodbank Victoria to divert surplus farm produce from waste to food relief.

This work is guided by *Recycling Victoria: A new economy*, the Government's 10-year circular economy policy released in 2020. The policy provides a strong platform for action across sectors, including agriculture.

While the Government does not consider a formal review of the policy necessary at this time, opportunities to further integrate agriculture into Victoria's circular economy will continue to be identified and supported as part of ongoing implementation.

Recommendation 31

That the Victorian Government review the policy and costing framework for recycled and stormwater supply infrastructure. The review should identify opportunities for the more equitable division of costs and to enhance agricultural access to these resources.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

The Victorian Government is reviewing and evolving the Integrated Water Management Investment Framework as outlined in Action 3-3 of the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*. This includes reviewing the capacity of key water industry stakeholders to raise funds for and deliver integrated water management projects, including through cost-sharing arrangements where priority projects deliver multiple community benefits.

Victorian water corporations are subject to independent pricing regulation to ensure investment is prudent and efficient and operate under a cost recovery mechanism. While the use of recycled and stormwater sources can help strengthen the resilience of Victoria's food supply system to water availability shocks and stressors, delivering recycled water and stormwater infrastructure often requires significant investment to build treatment facilities and supply networks.

The Government will continue to partner with organisations responsible for water management and land use planning to identify opportunities for a more strategic approach to improved access to recycled water and stormwater.

Recommendation 32

That Agriculture Victoria develop an education program, workshops, online resources and networking opportunities to support Victorian farmers to establish, expand and promote community supported agriculture businesses.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN FULL

Agriculture Victoria provides services (including workshops, online resources and networking opportunities) to support farmers to make decisions that balance and achieve social, economic and environmental benefits and build the profitability and resilience of farm businesses in a changing climate.

Recommendation 33

That the Victorian Government support community food initiatives which enhance the productivity or resilience of Victoria's food supply at the local level. It should consider supporting the development and implementation of local and state government food strategies, including community food enterprises, urban agriculture projects, co-ops, school farms, crop-swaps, farmers markets, etc. It should also prioritise communities with few alternative food sources to the major supermarkets.

RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government understands the value of community food initiatives to improve the connection between agriculture and the public, and the productivity and resilience of local food sources. The Government has supported organisations to deliver Pop-up Food Relief Markets across metropolitan Melbourne. This approach seeks to provide Victorians with access to healthy, low-cost, and culturally appropriate food in a dignified way.

The Government has supported a range of social enterprises to support community food initiatives, including:

- A \$5.5 million Secondary Schools Agriculture Fund in 2022-2024 to support students transition into agricultural careers, and a \$250,000 grant in 2024-25 to the Community Grocer to provide food relief to people living in social housing.
- \$6.5 million over 3 years for local food partnerships for collective action on local food systems.
- \$2 million for Growing Healthy Communities Grants focussed on local food systems.
- \$2.7 million over 3 years for the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation program to support Victorian primary schools prioritising, First Nations and culturally diverse communities who face structural barriers to good health.

The Government continues to look for opportunities to expand this work and will continue to target and adjust government funding to meet current and emerging needs.

