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This form highlights specific issues the Office of Agricultural Sustainability and Food Security is seeking comment on and refers to information provided in Agriculture Industry Action Plan Issues Paper which can be downloaded from the Department of Primary Industries website at [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au).

If you represent a peak body or other organisation, to assist us with consideration of your submission, it would be helpful to receive one submission that reflects the views of your organisation, rather than multiple submissions from different parts. Please include a single contact name, postal address and the number of members in your organisation (if appropriate).

If your submission is lengthy (more than 10 pages) it would helpful to include an Executive Summary with any recommendations included.

Submissions can be lodged by:

**Post** Agriculture Industry Action Plan submissions  
NSW Department of Primary Industries  
PO Box 1386, Bathurst NSW 2795

**Email** [agriculture.iap@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:agriculture.iap@dpi.nsw.gov.au) (as an attachment)

**Fax** (02) 6332 1458

**Note** **Closing date for submissions is Friday 2 August 2013**

### Information on privacy and confidentiality

Submissions received may be published on the Department of Primary Industries website. If you wish your submission or your personal details to be treated confidentially then you can request that this occurs. Please indicate your preference by ticking the relevant box below. You should be aware that the Department of Primary Industries may be required by law to release copies of submissions received to third parties. A request for access to a confidential submission will be determined in accordance with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*.

Please be aware that if you **do not** make a request for confidentiality, then the Department of Primary Industries may make your submission, including any personal details contained in the submission, available to the public. More information on the Department's privacy policy can be found on the Trade & Investment website at [www.trade.nsw.gov.au/legal/privacy](http://www.trade.nsw.gov.au/legal/privacy)

I would like my submission to be treated confidentially		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
I would like my personal details to be treated confidentially		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Name	Katrina Luckie		
Organisation (if applicable)	Regional Development Australia - Northern Rivers	No. of members	11
Postal address	PO Box 146		
	Lismore NSW	Postcode	2480
Stakeholder group	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry group	<input type="checkbox"/> Community group	<input type="checkbox"/> Government
Please indicate which of the following best represents your interest by ticking one box only	<input type="checkbox"/> Farmer or grazier	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental interests	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify
	<input type="checkbox"/> Community member	<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal interest	Regional development NGO

Executive summary (optional)

Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers (RDA – Northern Rivers) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the NSW Agriculture Industry Action Plan.

Our organisation is a non-profit community-based and regionally focused organisation that connects people and businesses in our region to opportunities through partnerships focusing on community, environment and economy. RDA – Northern Rivers encourages the NSW Government for taking a proactive approach towards the issues surrounding agriculture industry development. This response must acknowledge that many agricultural products are commodity style (e.g. wheat) and the NSW Agriculture Industry Action Plan needs to recognise the NSW volume is part of the national pool of product, so should integrate with other States that are also selling these products internationally.

The Northern Rivers is well positioned for agriculture with productive soils, a strong and diverse agricultural sector and is renowned for quality foods. Agriculture is an important industry providing a significant contribution to employment and gross regional production. Meat and dairy continue to be a major user of agricultural lands, accounting for 90% of the region's milk supply from 145 dairy farms; 29,525 tonnes of crops; 4,010,186 head of livestock; 21,525 tonnes of vegetables and 44, 978 tonnes of fruit. The agricultural industry is supported by local organisations with strong research capabilities, including the Sustain Northern Rivers Climate Change Collaboration which is pursuing innovative new ways to mitigate climate change.

RDA – Northern Rivers has an investment in supporting our regional food industry, and has released the following publications to assist with understanding local trends:

- Northern Rivers Food Industry Profile (2011)
- Northern Rivers Food Investment Prospectus (2011)
- Survey of Food Retailers (2010)
- Survey of Food Producers (2010).

In addition, we have auspiced the development and transition to independence of the Northern Rivers Food industry association; conducted a local food source identification/labelling project; developed the MyFood Northern Rivers Smartphone App; and currently maintain the [www.sustainfood.com.au](http://www.sustainfood.com.au) website, coordinated the Northern Rivers Sugar Industry Workforce Transition Project (including the development of a new approach to labour supply through the North Coast Shared Labour Pool with the sugar, macadamia and tea tree industries - see [sharedlabourpool.com.au](http://sharedlabourpool.com.au)).

1. What do you see are the key issues for the agriculture sector over the next 1-2 years, 10 years?

Moving from a production focus to a profit focus: this is a major skill gap in many agricultural sectors  
Equal access to international markets  
Low or equitable distribution/logistics/freight costs from the Northern Rivers region (and possibly other regions in NSW) to point of sale. A key example relates to road/bridge differential limits between NSW and QLD resulting in Northern Cooperative Meat Company delivering containers that are not 100% capacity to the Port of Brisbane and subsequently being less competitive with companies in QLD using similar markets.  
Ageing farmers/workforce, predominance towards a family business model limit capacity for succession planning  
Entry costs due to land value can be prohibitive in some areas, such as coastal NSW (i.e. value of land in some areas is inflated and does not reflect agricultural productivity or profitability)  
Low community awareness of value of agriculture, in terms of important land stewardship role and real costs of food production. The price of food needs to better reflect the costs associated with food production and land stewardship. Current prices do not even reflect food production costs, and wholesalers, distributors and consumers do not recognise the role of farmers as resource stewards or support their capacity to invest in best land management practice.  
Sustainability of soil resources, natural resource management requirements and impacts of climate change on productivity and land management practices. Environmental performance needs to acknowledge the whole of the supply chain (including transport, processing, packaging, retail etc.), and factors such as the scarcity of oil and costs of energy will have an impact on the food sector.  
On the North Coast of NSW, increased instances of high intensity rainfall events and/or floods can have a cumulative effect on crop productivity and return to grower.  
A particular concern raised by communities in the Northern Rivers region is the potential and currently unknown impacts of coal seam gas mining on the natural resource base and on the local agricultural industry.

2. How can innovation and productivity be improved in the agriculture sector?

By adopting a better understanding of markets and using market intelligence, as this is not generally practiced in agriculture.  
The sector is good at adapting to new processes and technology.  
Support R&D investments with on ground extension services and support.

3. What can industry do differently to encourage the agriculture sector to grow?

Be prepared to change and adopt an export orientation to overseas markets.  
Address issues such as level of waste in food consumption and obesity to increase level of food available for export markets. A critical barrier to nutritional outcomes is the cost and availability of processed food, which is reflected by 86% of Australians not eating enough fruit and vegetables each day, contributing towards an estimated \$206 million health impact cost and 62% of males and 45% of females being overweight.  
The industry needs to work for itself and be less reliant on government, which requires establishing leadership and collaborating to get better outcomes.

4. What can government do differently to encourage the agriculture sector to grow?

Enable equal access to international markets and ensure that importers of agricultural products are subject to the same standards in production, quality control and environmental management as Australian food producers and growers.  
Consumers need to have access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, skills to prepare these foods, support for community gardens, restrictions on fast food advertising during children's television hours and mandatory requirements for food served in public institutions to ensure an adequate supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.  
Invest in protecting and restoring the health, quality and productivity of soil and water systems, supported by monitoring of natural resources used in the food supply chain.

5. How can your industry enhance the competitiveness of the agriculture sector?

Support industry cluster development at a regional scale.  
Provide a facilitating or networking capability to bring agricultural participants across different sub-sectors together; and to provide linkages to other support and assistance, particularly regarding accessing training and skill development opportunities to improve productivity.

6. How can governments (whether State, Commonwealth or local) enhance the competitiveness of the agriculture sector?

Ensure the protection of prime agricultural land and prevent it being reduced to unproductive scale.  
Provide enabling infrastructure, particularly roads and infrastructure.  
Provide assistance to support cluster and network facilitation.

7. What are the opportunities that the agriculture sector can capitalise on over the next decade?

The trend to healthier living internationally e.g. less sugar, salt etc.  
The requirement for protein in developing economies.  
Climate change will provide opportunities in some regions but challenges in others.

8. What does the industry need to do first to improve growth in the agriculture sector?

Understand market dynamics.  
Improve the profile of agriculture and diversity of employment opportunities.  
Explore solutions such as shared labour pools, lease/share farming to improve productivity on land and within the workforce.

9. What does the government need to do first to improve growth in the agriculture sector?

Enable access to international markets, roads, infrastructure and water.  
Improve current systems and support a transition to sustainable low-input/low carbon farming systems.  
Facilitate succession planning initiatives to maintain a viable workforce in the future.  
Whilst R&D is critical to maintain innovation, competitiveness and productivity, it needs to be complemented by adequately resourced extension and advisory services to provide targeted and practical assistance to implement the findings and results of R&D initiatives. Extension services have been withdrawn by Governments, and have a very minor presence in NSW. Without this on-ground assistance, the return on investment to R&D may not achieve its full potential.

10. What is stopping the agriculture sector in NSW from taking up these opportunities?

Agriculture is generally about production and not enough time is allocated to understanding where things are sold and what consumers want and expect.  
Businesses often lack the time and resources to participate in State consultations, and leadership will most readily emerge at a scale where people can relate to each other. In business and industry, regions often provide an appropriate scale for leadership and coordination to be highly effective, but there is often a lack of critical mass and consequently industry resources to sustain this activity.

11. What are some of the low cost solutions that industry can do in the short term?

Profile industry to improve image

12. What are some of the low cost solutions that government can do in the short term?

Provide financial support to sustain industry development functions or organisations to build local leadership and coordination at a regional scale.

Develop programs to reward or subsidise alternative inputs to production (composts, animal manures, biochar etc.) which have proven health benefits and potential to improve profit margins in the long term.

Review models applied in other countries, such as Canada to address agricultural viability.

Educate consumers to understand real costs of food production, and benefits of Australian quality and environmental standards for domestic food production.

Provide sufficient resources for comprehensive scientific research on the economic, social and environmental benefits and impacts of coal seam gas extraction on agriculture and food production and associated resources such land and water quality and availability.

13. What actions or roles are you prepared to undertake to assist in positioning the agriculture sector in NSW for future growth?

Provide data and information on regional trends and opportunities

Work with industry to build clusters and networks and profile the industry, including employment opportunities

14. Other comments (optional)

As a region, the Northern Rivers is responding to agriculture and food industry development in practical ways through program delivery, capacity-building and strategic planning. Strengthening the existing agriculture industry and promoting business development will continue to bolster this region's agriculture supply chain, enhancing food security for the region.

For further information on the matters raised in this submission, contact Katrina Luckie (CEO) on 02 6622 4011.

**More information**

Contact NSW Department of Primary Industries on (02) 6330 1209 or email [agriculture.iap@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:agriculture.iap@dpi.nsw.gov.au)