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Govt urged to nurture suburban food bowls

By Brigid Andersen

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The Federal Government has been urged introduce policies to allow the development of agriculture in Australian suburbs as a way of addressing food security.

A senior research fellow at Griffith University's urban research program says there will be increased pressure on urban areas to produce food in the future.

Dr Jago Dodson says sustaining Australia's metropolitan areas will get harder as environmental issues and population growth impact food supplies.

"We need to start planning ahead and conceptualising what institutional and policy structures we need to have in place so that if we came to the point in the future that we had to rapidly expand our food production then we'd be easily able to do so," he said.

"There's a task for governments to ramp up their understanding and policies on this area."

Dr Dodson says suburban agricultural projects like community gardens would allow cities to combat food security issues.

"In the context of some of the big challenges we're facing - challenges about the sustainability of rural and regional agriculture, challenges about drought conditions, changing environmental conditions, questions about global warming's impact on food supplies across the world and also questions about the sustainability of petroleum, which is one of the key inputs into industrial agricultural systems - those big changes are going to start to motivate more creatively how we produce food in society," he said.

"Inevitably, looking towards the suburbs or communities to sustain themselves with their own food production



*A Queensland academic says there is plenty of space in urban environments to grow food.
(AAP: Mick Tsikas, file photo)*

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will be quite important."

Dr Dodson says there is plenty of space in urban environments to grow food.

"There's a lot of discussion about the notion of urban foodscapes. More and more planning programs and garden parks and development projects that councils undertake should start to incorporate food," he said.

"Instead of planting exotic species in our nature strips and our parks we should shift over to planting food species, which provide us both with the amenity that we want them for but they also provide us with the food as well.

"We're also starting to see guerilla gardening become an issue for councils. Residents decide that instead of the natives on the nature strip they choose to plant it out with vegie gardens."

Dr Dodson says there is considerable potential for large volumes of food to be produced in Australia's cities and he says this has become a focus for research and design.

"Landscape architects and landscape design communities and the horticultural communities are offering ideas about how agriculture can be incorporated into urban space," he said.

"There are models by which households can lease their backyard to either non-profit or for profit collectors that then utilise many, many, many backyards for larger scale suburban food growth.

"In return the households receive a share of the produce that is grown on their lot."

But Dr Dodson says urban agriculture - especially community gardens - is often undervalued by local governments.

"There are some problems with local councils understanding of the value and management of community gardens," he said.

"Community gardens I'm aware of in Brisbane have faced a few difficulties getting off the ground, so to speak, and convincing council to hand over a small patch of land to develop the garden, negotiating their way through the council processes."

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