

Letter to SMH, in response to <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/when-fields-yield-to-houses-per-hectare-20101126-18ao0.html>

Sent: Tuesday, 30 November 2010 11:03 AM

Dear Sir/Madam,

Elizabeth Farrelly makes some good points about why we must value the food-producing land on Sydney's fringes, but hasn't acknowledged how it is being protected.

The NSW Government recognises the economic and environmental importance of local fresh food production and seeks to maintain viable rural activities and protect resource lands from unnecessary encroachment through the establishment of the North West and South West Growth Centres in 2005.

Rather than devouring Sydney's fringe land, the Growth Centres actually help contain Sydney's urban sprawl by focusing development for 500,000 people in areas where 95 per cent of the land is NOT used for food production.

At 27,000 hectares, the Growth Centres are indeed the biggest staged land release in the State's history; that's because we want to implement high environmental and sustainability benchmarks over an extensive area for the next 30-40 years with well-planned infrastructure and recreational space, rather than allow piecemeal development.

Sydney's population will grow from 4.3 million to almost 6 million between 2006 and 2036, largely through longer life expectancy, but we cannot allow Sydney to expand its boundaries at the same rate it did in the past. If it did, we would need around 850 square kilometres of fringe land to meet our projected housing needs by 2030.

But by focusing most new release development in the Growth Centres, the same population growth can be housed in just 350 square km -- saving 500 square km of valuable fringe land.

Sydney also has the lowest proportion of its new housing in greenfield areas (currently targeted at 30-40 per cent; in other Australian capital cities, it is over 50 per cent).

Incidentally, the North West Growth Centre does not include the five historic Macquarie towns named in Ms Farrelly's essay; it stretches from Marsden Park, Schofields and Riverstone in the south to Vineyard and Box Hill in the north.

Kind regards,

*Ian Reynolds
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