

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply**

Bendigo – Thursday 23 May 2024

#### **MEMBERS**

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

Nicole Werner

**WITNESSES**

Tammi Jonas, Owner, Jonai Farms; and

Will Bennett, Owner, Pig and Earth Farm.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the public hearing in Bendigo. I will just run through some important formalities before we begin.

All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so for you to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you very much for making the time to meet with our committee today. Would you please state your full name and title before making any opening remarks that you may wish to make. Tammi.

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes. I am Tammi Jonas from Jonai Farms and Meatsmiths and the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome.

**Will BENNETT:** I am Will Bennett, Owner of Pig and Earth Farm.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. We are delighted to have you here today. I know you have met Martha already. We have got David Hodgett, the Member for Croydon; we have Nicole Werner, the Member for Warrandyte; Martha Haylett, the Member for Ripon; Martin Cameron, Deputy Chair and the Member for Morwell; and I am Juliana Addison, the Member for Wendouree, which is central Ballarat. Thank you very much for being with us. Would you like to have a bit of a talk to us first?

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes. I am here obviously coming from farming on Djaara country, the same as Will does, and pay our respects to elders past and present. I am also the president of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, so although I will speak more in terms of what is going on with our farms, while I am here to give you that granular detail, I cannot help but bring a decade of food sovereignty alliance advocacy with me, which I think should prove useful. Also, just in case it is useful, I just finished a PhD on the rise of small-scale farmers in this country and the regulatory barriers that they are facing.

**Martha HAYLETT:** Amazing.

**The CHAIR:** I think that would be very useful.

**Tammi JONAS:** It might be useful. I will just start by saying in terms of the barriers to food supply here and elsewhere, land of course is one of the biggest problems – we have land access and secure tenure for small-scale farmers in particular – and a kind of shocking stat is that globally 1 per cent of farm owners operate or control 70 per cent of the world's farmland. That is a global statistic. In Australia 14 per cent are enjoying 59 per cent of our agricultural value. So smallholders are bigger in number, but we do not control most of the land, as we know, but also most of the value.

We know that urban sprawl obviously has an impact, and you would have heard about that from plenty of the city NGOs in particular, I would think. One of the things, if we get time, I would like to talk about is the zoning, how some zones that are considered to be compatible between residential living and farming, like the rural living zone or rural conservation, do not often turn out to be very compatible – so zoning changes could be a way to support more of our kind of farming – and obviously land degradation and the fact that the wealthiest landowners keep snapping up more of the best land, leaving less good land for smallholding farming.

The second aspect after land is infrastructure. Value chain infrastructure is the biggest gap. You were talking about abattoirs before, and we are going to talk a lot about abattoirs in just a second. The consolidation of ownership largely through vertical integration and now increasingly by multinationals buying up all of those vertically integrated facilities means the end of small-scale farmers like us, and that has happened across Australia and across the world. To give you an example of how broad it is, in Cambodia it is rice mills and here

it is abattoirs. So every country has a problem of ownership of their value chain or what we like to think of as value extraction chains, because if you are a smallholder you do not usually get value added, you get it extracted when you engage with those.

Now to abattoirs. JBS of course bought Diamond Valley, or Rivalea, in 2021; it went through in 2022. They now control a third of pig kills in Australia – 33 per cent go through that one place. Our access to that abattoir – both of us use the abattoir, but Will will talk in a moment to the change he made from the abattoir that stopped taking pigs: they immediately reduced our access to the abattoir, and we live in fear of them just saying they are not processing for smallholders anymore.

Kilcoy bought Hardwicks the year before; it went through in 2021. What you will not read in the news about what is going on with Hardwicks is that we are still processing there – that was not accurate actually about them stopping smallholder kills right now. They did stop processing goats recently and they also stopped doing organic kills recently, and so those growers have already been affected. The rest of us are still using them, but from month to month we do not know whether we will ring up and they will say, ‘No more.’

The lumpers, the guys who deliver the carcasses back, because I have an on-farm butcher shop, tell us what is not in the news. What they are telling us is that the reason they are turning up in a huge truck to deliver to my farm, which is destroying our driveway, is because the owners, Kilcoy, are now saying that they do not want to send the little trucks out because they only want to send big lots out, and they are not delivering to very many butchers compared with how many they used to. They are also not delivering very much Victorian meat. They are mostly now accessing SA Meats and processing it through Hardwicks, and that is Victoria’s supply. Right now Victorian meat is not getting to Victorians unless it is through smallholders who sell directly, like through farmers markets. So we are losing that supply already, and the risk is enormous. I am not a person who is easily alarmed, and we are so alarmed we just processed three cattle. We normally do one per month or two every second month. We did three to get ahead of this problem, to try to get our abattoir built in time before they tell us we cannot go there anymore. If Hardwicks shuts us all out, that leaves very few options, and they do not have capacity for us. So it would just be the end of small-scale livestock farming.

Then to tell you what has happened in terms of our abattoir project: we have been farming since 2011. We raise pigs and cattle on the volcanic soils of Djaara county, and we have an on-farm butcher shop. In about 2017 we got serious about investigating abattoir building. Fast-forward to November 2022: we submitted our development application to the council, and we had a lot of excellent support from the planning advisory services at AgVic – I am sure you know about them. They have been an incredible support to the smallholders in helping us navigate what the planning legislation looks like and how to make sure we are fitting within the decision guidelines. We submitted that. The council immediately referred it to the EPA, even though the microabattoir was well below EPA thresholds; it should not have been the referring authority, but it was sent to them. Happily – and you do not hear this very often – the EPA very readily approved it. That is not a common story, but it did. We were so far below the threshold even the EPA went, ‘I mean, this is fine.’ So then council granted approval –

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, can I ask: what is the threshold? Is it kilograms or weight?

**Tammi JONAS:** Two hundred tonnes of organic waste produced on farm retained on farm does not trigger a threshold for them, and we were going to come in at 34. Through the VCAT process, which you will hear about, we actually bumped it up to 132 tonnes as the maximum we might ever in the world reach, but we actually do not think we would get to that. Council approved the project in July 2023, having applied in November 2022. The neighbours, the lifestylers across the road from us, immediately objected. That 60-acre property and a 20-acre property were the lead applicants in this case. One of them is a developer who land-banks the property across from us – he actually never visits the property, except maybe once a year – and the one next to him, who was the actual lead applicant, bought that for \$2.7 million 18 months before they lodged the application against us. They come up on weekends and they mow on his and hers mowers. That is their entire interaction with farming in our place, except to try to stop us doing what we do.

The VCAT review of course then went on for some time. There was a practice day hearing to determine whether we were interfering with the area of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity. We are on a volcano. We had no intention of developing that area. We are very respectful of Djaara land. We think that that was them weaponising Aboriginal sensitivity against us for agricultural purposes. That happened in December 2023. In

December 2023 we had the first compulsory conference, then in January 2023 a second compulsory conference, because we did not settle. The hearing was in February 2024. Three weeks later, apparently very quickly for VCAT, we got the resounding success that we were approved by VCAT.

The member in her statement about the decision said that she was not compelled by the applicants', the objectors', concern that we were trying to turn this into an industrial zone or that abattoirs were not intrinsic to agriculture. Non-coincidentally I had one of my PhD articles published that week of the hearing, called *Building the Intrinsic Infrastructure of Agroecology*, about abattoirs and boning rooms and things. So she was more compelled by our argument that abattoirs are in fact intrinsic. On the intrinsic nature of it she made the point that a boning room, which we had operated under rural industry, which is a section 1 use in the farming zone, so with no permit required, had operated for 10 years already. She said, 'I've heard no complaints,' and she also said, 'And I'm not inviting any,' I was pleased to hear. She said this was not an add-on; this was actually a step back in the process in terms of ancillary agricultural activities. This comes before the boning room. This should actually be an appropriate use in the zone, especially because of the extremely micro nature of the facility.

Council was remiss, they said in an email when they sent us the permit two months later after VCAT's decision. So it was 550 days from application to getting the permit. And then council immediately said that we needed to apply for an amendment, because we had said we were going to quickly build a vehicle-based abattoir, because this had taken nearly two years, and now they said they wanted to tie that to land use. But when the minister actually approved mobile abattoirs in the amendment to the *Meat Industry Act*, the intention very much was to decouple that from land use because of the small nature and the light touch of a microabattoir. So right now there is confusion amongst planners and government in terms of the guidance that is coming from the minister.

AFSA, the food sovereignty alliance, has been advocating for an amendment to the scheme, and it is in our submission, actually, for I think six years, and it is really simple: provide a definition of microabattoir in the scheme that says a microabattoir process is less than a thousand livestock units a year – that comes well under that EPA threshold then – and then include microabattoirs as part of rural industry section 1 use so you do not have to apply for a planning permit, because even the EPA agrees it is not a threat to environment amenity. You obviously still have to have an environmental management plan and these things and a licence with PrimeSafe, but that very simple amendment would eradicate those hurdles for all the farmers who are now following our plans for our abattoir. Our containers are being delivered. The build has begun. We are in conversation with council about whether we need to amend the existing permit or not, but we are building because we think before Christmas Hardwicks will stop all of us.

I will just say I would love to be asked later about how any of this relates to the Hepburn rural strategy, which is underway right now. There was mention of intensive livestock and the role of that in securing our food supply, and then policy coherence as achieved in a place like Brazil, through the way they do that. But I would also love for Will to share his abattoir experience if he would like.

**Will BENNETT:** My experience was that I was using Castle Estate abattoirs for about five years. I butcher pork and lamb, and they would kill them. I used them every month for five years, and then I rang up one day and they said, 'We're not taking them anymore.' Then three months later they ended up shutting down completely. I have to go to Hardwicks and then Diamond Valley. Again, I am the last on the list, so if they say they cannot fit me in that week or that month, I do not get to kill. At Hardwicks you work with one guy and he sort of decides whether your business is going to be viable or not for that month. We really need this abattoir that is being built because it is just such vital infrastructure.

**Martha HAYLETT:** It must be up the road from you. It will be perfect.

**Will BENNETT:** Yes, it is only 5 minutes.

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes, we are 10 k's apart. Will has already been butchering in our boning room for six, seven years.

**Will BENNETT:** Yes.

**Martha HAYLETT:** Can I just, firstly, ask: what is the rationale of Hardwicks as to why they are not taking smaller amounts? Have they said why?

**Tammi JONAS:** The historical reason why Hardwicks and others do not favour smallholders – Hardwicks were a family business. They always did it. Contract kill was their business. But the others say it is because of administrative load, like dealing with us coming with six to 10 pigs or one beef at Hardwicks. We are a nuisance. It is a lot of work for them, to be fair. If your business model is built on scale and speed, we are not that. It is an incompatible part of their business model. But with Hardwicks specifically, since they became Kilcoy it is because they are entirely focused on export now. It will not be very long before all meat that goes through Kilcoy will go to China. It will not actually come into Victoria at all. I think there should be an inquiry specifically into the loss of the ability to process meat for Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Can we just go back. I have been to Hardwicks, so I have got a very clear picture in my head of their little shop where you can buy things. You take your animal to them. What do you get back? What does it look like in terms of after your animal has been to Hardwicks? What product do you get back?

**Tammi JONAS:** We get the whole carcasses back because we have our own butcher shop, and the traceability question is real. We have only had one carcass in 10 years that came back. Because I am the butcher, I looked at it and said, 'That's not ours.' They denied it, and you cannot argue with your only option. We had to just tell our CSA members they were getting some kind of supermarket beef that month because I had no idea what the providence of this carcass was. But Will has actually had more mix-ups.

**Will BENNETT:** I have had lambs not come back. They just disappeared. I have had other people's lambs come to me that are not mine. I have only used them for nine months.

**David HODGETT:** Do they offer a butchering service?

**Tammi JONAS:** Not to smallholders that I am aware of.

**David HODGETT:** They just kill, and they have to come back to you or another butcher.

**Tammi JONAS:** Just contract kill. If you want to sell to them, you can. Well, I do not know if they will take this small a holding, but they do not butcher for us.

**The CHAIR:** Are your costs much higher because you are so small? Is there a real financial cost for being such a small-scale farm?

**Tammi JONAS:** I actually do not know whether they scale it once you have put in 10 or 100 or 1000. I do not know. I know our costs have gone up dramatically over these last several years so that now to kill one beef it is about \$180, and if it is over 300 kilos it is 50 cents a kilo extra on top of the whole carcass, not just the extra kilos. It can be \$350 if you are at 305 kilos. It is very expensive. Then there is a \$100 carcass transport fee back to the butcher shop. And they no longer will give us our hides back, but we also do not get a hide fee for them keeping it, which in the early years we got. We used to get a hide fee, then if you wanted your hide you could buy it back from them to the tune of, I think, \$150 to buy our own hide back off our own carcass. Then recently they stopped letting us have the hide back at all. So it is another value-add opportunity that has been taken away from us.

**Martha HAYLETT:** I do not know if you have made complaints to the relevant regulator, but do you feel there are the proper mechanisms to raise these concerns with government or with any – I do not know who exactly who the regulator is, if it is AgVic or someone else, but do you feel that there is the proper two-way street to be able to make complaints about these issues?

**Tammi JONAS:** I do not think so. I think your only option there would be the ACCC, essentially, because it is a consumer issue, and they are the ones who oversaw those purchases by those companies. We put in submissions to the purchase of Rivalea by JBS. They said they saw that they had greater incentive to diminish smallholder access because of their business model, and they still approved the sale. So no, we do not feel that we are given many options of where to complain. You also do not really want to. Like I said, you cannot complain about the only ones who process for you. It is really risky.

**Nicole WERNER:** This might be an ignorant question, but I just wanted to understand the place of the home kill type of butchers. They obviously are not for commercial purposes; they would be for private. But is there an avenue where someone like that could become a commercial – I suppose that would just be a mobile abattoir, essentially.

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes. They already can since the changes in – it was 2021, right, that the *Meat Industry Act* was amended, after Provenir advocated for that reform? No other mobile abs have commercialised that I am aware of, aside from Provenir, and I think it is largely to do with the cost prohibition. I do not know exactly, but it is like a \$1.5 million truck, or something.

**Nicole WERNER:** Right.

**Tammi JONAS:** For our scale it is just way – we cannot.

**Nicole WERNER:** So in terms of the regulations that they have to meet, the requirements they have to meet, your home butcher or the ones that come to people's farms, that kind of thing – they are not going to scale up to that because that is just not viable for them?

**Tammi JONAS:** No, because a fixed facility just needs to have that kind of hygienic nature – the ability to be cleaned down thoroughly for food safety at the end of the day. Or you need to do that in a truck, which is a much bigger engineering feat, especially if you are killing cattle. So the fixed facility is actually cheaper to build. That is why we are going down that path ourselves. But the small guys with the trailer, they are like us; they do not have a million bucks to put into that.

**Nicole WERNER:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Will, can you tell us more about your business?

**Will BENNETT:** Yes. I am on 40 acres, and I run pigs and lamb. I get them killed and then butcher them at Tammi's place and then sell the meat direct to customers. I do home deliveries around Melbourne, Ballarat, Daylesford and farmers markets as well.

**The CHAIR:** And just out of interest, in this cost-of-living crisis that we are well aware of, are you finding people are making decisions that, 'Oh, yes, we love Will's product but we just can't,' or people are really saying, 'No, this is a priority for us; we know that the quality that we're getting from Will Bennett is worth it'? What is the market looking like for you at the moment?

**Will BENNETT:** No, in the last year there has been a decline – down 10 per cent in sales, maybe something like that. And because it is a subscription system, I think people do not want that monthly cost anymore. Farmers markets are steady, but that monthly thing people are less willing to commit to at the moment. So yes, I do think sales are down in the last year.

**The CHAIR:** And in terms of the people that you provide your subscription service to, why are they choosing to have a subscription service with you? What motivates them?

**Will BENNETT:** Well, the point of CSA is that you can know the farmer. A lot of the people come to the farm. They see the animals. They know me. They know my family. They know where the food is from. They trust it, and it tastes better a lot of the time.

**The CHAIR:** I am jumping in a whole lot; people, jump in at any time. We have heard a lot about young people not being interested in farming. You have come from a farming background. What is it that attracted you to the life that you have?

**Will BENNETT:** I do not come from a farming background.

**The CHAIR:** Oh, okay.

**Will BENNETT:** I grew up in Ballarat, in the city, and then I was doing other stuff. But I got a job on a farm and just fell in love with it, so I decided to go down that avenue. I studied ag, and now I am doing my

graduate certificate in sustainable agriculture. Yes, I just fell in love with it. I love working with the animals and being outdoors and that connection to the land.

**The CHAIR:** And do you lease your land?

**Will BENNETT:** I own it.

**The CHAIR:** You own it?

**Will BENNETT:** Well, through a mortgage. Close enough.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. You are working to own it.

**Will BENNETT:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Amazing. That is certainly wonderful to see people choosing in 2011. Did you come from a farming background, Tammi?

**Tammi JONAS:** I grew up on a cattle ranch in Oregon, but I had been in Melbourne for 20 years. It was a very different kind of farming.

**Martha HAYLETT:** Can you tell us a little bit more about community-supported agriculture and that subscription model that you use on both of your farms? We heard a little bit about that, like I was saying earlier, at Harcourt this morning, but can you share with us a little bit more about that?

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes, I do not know if Harcourt share, but CSA started really in Japan in the 70s. It was organic farmers saying that they wanted security and they wanted to feed people organic food that did not have chemicals in it, and that exchange seemed to work for people. It became the risk-sharing model that it is today, so you share risk and reward. If something goes wrong, people still pay the farmer, and that is something that is very hard for Australians to get their heads around. When we first became a CSA a decade ago we were one of three in the country, actually, and now there are hundreds, so we have seen that change in that time. We have advocated for that change, obviously. To give you some examples of how extreme it is, I guess, we lost 16 cattle in a catastrophic feed incident while we were away and a farmhand was in charge, and we only had 23 cattle, so when I say catastrophic, I mean most of the herd. We had to work out how to replace the herd. We had to deal with killing the last ones on farm that were not dead – all these things that had to happen. But members immediately came forward saying, ‘We’re prepared to just keep paying those bills every month until you can have beef again.’ Our supplier, actually, who was breeding the cattle, said, ‘I can provide you with replacement ones. Some of my old empty cows, I can give you those, and you can start paying back as you kill them, so that you don’t have to front up this money again.’ That whole network of community supporting each other just kicked in. One member signed up all of her best friends for a workshop so that we got another couple-of-thousand-dollar injection to be able to start replacing the herd. And then it goes both ways. I have had members who have temporarily lost work, and we kept supplying them with meat for a few months while they got back into some sort of employment. During the pandemic when people could not go more than 5 k’s we made sure that it was delivered to their door instead of the hub where they normally pick up. So they are genuine relationships, not just transactions for food, for money. They are actually communities looking after each other. I would not sell food any other way. It is just the best.

**Martha HAYLETT:** And what is your experience with it, Will?

**Will BENNETT:** Yes, very similar. When I started – I guess CSA is five years old now. I have still got people from that first month, so every month for five years they have been getting their meat from us. They brought their kids to our farm early on, and you have seen them grow up. You just make a real connection with these people. They are not really customers; they are kind of part of the farm.

**Tammi JONAS:** They call us ‘our farm’. They refer to it as ‘our farm’. It is quite sweet.

**Martha HAYLETT:** And how many would you have – how many subscribers?

**Will BENNETT:** I have got about 40 to 50 families.

**Tammi JONAS:** And we usually have 80.

**Martha HAYLETT:** Fantastic.

**David HODGETT:** Can I just clarify: under your current permit, the conditions from the tribunal, you can do 30 sheep and six pigs one day a week. Is that correct?

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes, one day a week 30 pigs or sheep or six cattle.

**David HODGETT:** And if things happen, like you are saying, you want to expand, you have to go back to council to have that talk?

**Tammi JONAS:** But we do not want to expand. We are trying to show that this is – you know how there used to be abattoirs everywhere? We want to show that if ours gets up for \$150,000 and serves 10 to 12 of us, then 30 k's down the road, do it again and do it again. Then all of those people involved with these animals and the abattoirs and the butchers and the CSA members, they are all a community that keeps looking after each other in a truly supportive community.

**David HODGETT:** A similar model in multiple locations, and that serves the area.

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes.

**David HODGETT:** Okay, thank you.

**Martin CAMERON:** I am interested in bringing you back to meat from Victoria heading straight overseas. Is that the whole lot from everywhere in Victoria that will do that or just from the region around here with that abattoir?

**Tammi JONAS:** Everyone – whoever is servicing Hardwicks; actually I should say whoever is left by the time this happens. But that is where it is tracking. I would definitely be investigating that further and asking Kilcoy some very serious questions, because I think that the security of meat supply in Victoria is really vulnerable right now.

**Martin CAMERON:** That is incredible. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** And that has been since the change of ownership?

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** There has been a really different approach?

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes, because the Hardwicks family had become an export abattoir much earlier, so they were exporting as part of their business model, but as a local family, they were always committed to local contract kills. That was what the model was built on. Then they expanded into export and then they sold it, and Kilcoy has no interest in feeding Victoria, as far as we can tell. Like I said, they are not even supplying from Victorian farms mostly now.

**Martin CAMERON:** I like your term 'lifestylers' for those who live across the road from you. I quite like that. We have heard from various farmers around all the different areas about the encroachment of people that are outside the farming landscape going there for a lifestyle, who are causing grief. How do you deal with that? Is it manageable, or is it just constant – you are waiting for the next complaint to be made against you?

**Tammi JONAS:** I would say both of those things are true. We are managing it, demonstrably, but it takes an enormous amount of energy to manage it. The VCAT case was huge. People kept saying to me, 'Are you worried and are you scared?' Again, I am not easily worried or scared, but I was frustrated by the waste of energy. But then I have also always seen it as an opportunity. As the president of the food sovereignty alliance and involved in looking into planning legislation for so long for the whole country and globally, they picked the perfect farm to put through this wringer so we can identify where all those problems are and then bring them to all of you and say, 'We've got some ideas about how to reduce their impact on the smallholders, like us.' If it had been a different farm, I really hate to think how that would have gone. It took a lot of stamina and



knowledge. And we have resources. There is a legal defence fund within the food sovereignty alliance, so we get pro bono support from lawyers who help us with the planning legislation as well. So it is manageable, but I think all it takes is a council planner who is intimidated by a powerful lifestyle, who is ringing them every day telling them things that are not true, before the wrong decision is made and a different interpretation. I mean, that is the risk. It is not long-term manageable unless we make the reforms that are needed to protect farmers from the lifestyles.

Actually, can I answer the point about intensive agriculture that came up before as well, because AFSA does not go into bat for the right to farm in the same way that the farmers federation does. Obviously, the right to grow food and supply food here locally is deeply what we act on, but we absolutely believe in the right to farm responsibly, and intensive animal production is bringing an awful lot of risks. You have seen today's news about the outbreak of avian flu in Lethbridge. Those risks are only growing. Right now I am sure you have also seen that there is H5N1 in the dairy herd in America. These risks are compounding, and intensive livestock production really needs to reform dramatically. In terms of protecting farmers, yes, but we need to also really talk about the health of our production models and make sure that they are not going to end up making all of us terribly sick – so not opposed to food production but wanting to make sure that it is healthy.

**The CHAIR:** A question – go.

**Martha HAYLETT:** I was just going to say, Tammi, it is interesting that you say they picked the right business to take to VCAT and go through that process. You were saying that you learned many things along the way. What do you think you learned in terms of what needs to be reformed to avoid certain situations continuously happening for the smaller scale farms like yourself?

**Tammi JONAS:** The first one regarding abattoirs is straightforward. In the Victorian planning scheme, it is actually quite a simple amendment; it would not take much. Then abattoirs would be under rural industry, the farming zone would be protected. Rural activity zone would also be the same, you would expect. We have some other proposals I can send about rural living and rural conservation to rural industry. But sometimes that is about noise, and rural living is mostly along highways. If the problem is the noise of our boning room, which does not actually make any noise, then we need to think about whether that should have a higher barrier or not. Maybe the highway should have the barrier. So there are some of those reforms.

In terms of bigger reforms, those assessments of lifestyle properties. There is an absolute industry of what we would call unscrupulous planners going out and writing bogus farm plans so that their clients can build a house on a property they do not intend to farm. Our shire, Hepburn, is full of it. It was mentioned last night at the rural Hepburn strategy town information meeting at Newlyn. There were several farmers who talked about this problem, of these planners that submit – they are the same ones over and over. They submit plans. Somebody mentioned a \$5 million house went up. Nothing was farmed. Then it was sold to another lifestyle, and now it is never going to be farmed and it is lost – so a way to assess the genuine nature of farm plans. There is the 40-hectare restriction on building a house. In our shire they are proposing to raise that to 80 hectares. We made the point last night: well, that is a bias against small-scale farmers, who also need houses. I am only on 28.5 hectares, so it is not about size, it is about assessment of applications. It is about: how do you measure whether these people are really going to farm? So that is how you will do a better job protecting agricultural land.

And do not allow the encroachment of that urban sprawl, whether it is through the growth zone growing or putting in more rural living, because they are not compatible. We see complaints all the time when somebody is just doing small-scale growing and the person living next to them does not want to see pigs or geese. One of our farmers was raising ducks between Daylesford and Kyneton, on a 20-acre rural property in the farming zone, and her neighbour on a similar size took them to council with complaints, because he does not like ducks – they are 'poopy'. I do not think that is a genuine complaint.

**The CHAIR:** Taking on board everything Tammi has just shared with us, Will, what is the future of your farm?

**Will BENNETT:** I would just like to keep going, I suppose. I am not really interested in getting that much bigger. I do it all on my own. I do not hire anyone or anything like that; it is just me. So I just want to be

sustainable and keep going and to be a better farmer and manage the land better, feed more people. Yes, just to keep going and have access to abattoirs and the infrastructure I need.

**The CHAIR:** Apart from what Tammi has just talked about with a whole lot of broadbrush risks to small-scale farmers, are there any particular risks that you are really concerned about in terms of your farm and how it operates? Obviously, if anything was to happen to you, you would be in real trouble, but beyond anything happening to you, do you see any risks that the committee should be aware of when we are really looking at this food supply issue? Are there any things that –

**Will BENNETT:** I think infrastructure – so abattoirs – but then also zoning. I am in a farm zone, but I am just outside Kingston – so whether that would spread eventually to rural living or something like that. And because I am on 40 acres I have got a few houses around me already. That is definitely a risk, I suppose – if that were to start breaking up that land and more people moved in, lifestylers and that sort of thing. At this stage it is not happening, but yes, down the track.

**The CHAIR:** And broader issues? Are you worried about climate change or –

**Will BENNETT:** Yes, obviously climate. That is kind of why I got into farming a little bit, because I saw a massive problem like climate change, whereas regenerative agriculture was a solution to that to better manage pasture and have better food security through how you have animals locally and that sort of thing. So definitely that kind of inspired me to get more involved in agriculture and to see it as a solution rather than a problem for climate change.

**The CHAIR:** Any other questions?

**Martha HAYLETT:** I would probably just open it up a little bit more broadly about what you both see beyond your own farms as some of the challenges for the viability of small-scale farms. If you are thinking of others, what would you see as the biggest challenges?

**Tammi JONAS:** I think the thing I mentioned at the beginning about the consolidation of ownership of both land and infrastructure – that is one of the biggest threats. And right now for those who already are on land it is mostly about the infrastructure. We are losing access to processing, and that is obviously a real problem. We are both CSA, so we both do deliveries, and the cost of fuel going up constantly is a burden for people, especially if they are travelling further. We are not; we have both chosen very localised systems. But for those who are going to farmers markets, much further, those costs are getting really serious. The cost of living has the problem that Will already alluded to as well, that when your members cannot afford it anymore – so even if you are okay, you are not once they cannot buy your food anymore.

Actually something the food sovereignty alliance is advocating for is the idea of the universal basic income. If everyone could afford food, then the farmers could actually afford to live and feed them, you know. So we are fans of the UBI as a solution to making sure food is affordable for everybody.

**Martha HAYLETT:** You were just talking before we were on the record, on Hansard, about the Brazil model. It would be great for the committee to hear a bit more of your experience with that model.

**Tammi JONAS:** Yes, it was just that idea of: how do we make sure all the different portfolios understand the importance of food supply and production – so production, processing and distribution? In Brazil in the 90s, I think it was – it might have started in the 80s actually – there was a program to try to end hunger. One of the resulting initiatives was – I actually looked it up quickly in between – called CONSEA. Bolsonaro got rid of it in 2019, but it lasted from 1993 to 2019. It was a food policy council of sorts, and it had government and civil society representatives. Those government representatives had to come from quite high up in departments. It was not handed down to somebody to track what was happening elsewhere, it was actually a leadership question: was everybody in every portfolio thinking about food – so was health thinking about food, was agriculture thinking about food, was consumer affairs thinking about food? And then it was making sure it was not just a regulators concern either, that it was a policymakers concern. It is worth looking into because it was extremely successful for a very long time. I know some of the people that we know in Brazil are hoping that they are going to be able to revive it now that Lula is in power.

**Martha HAYLETT:** This is obviously about food supply, but the upper house are doing an inquiry into food insecurity right now, so obviously the two go together. I do not want to put anything more on your plate, but if you even wanted to add some of the information as a submission to that –

**Tammi JONAS:** We will, definitely. AFSA submits to every inquiry, and right now Victoria is going gangbusters with inquiries. We are struggling to keep up – and about six of them are about food supply and security, basically. So we will definitely be putting a submission in to that.

**The CHAIR:** I am looking around, and I am seeing a lot of people who look like they have got all their questions answered.

Tammi and Will, can I particularly say, because you are your organisations and for you to come here has meant that we have taken you off your farm and everything like that, we are so grateful for your insights. I will be very interested to know how I can support you at farmers markets or different things. Thank you very much for the work you do. We really look forward to sharing our inquiry report with you when it is tabled in the Parliament later in the year.

**Committee adjourned.**