

Retail therapy

Bringing the country to the city. P3

A forrest of wine

Ray Jordan reviews the region's best. P13

From paddock to plate our Southern Forests is committed to be WA's premiere food bowl

SOUTHERN BELLE





The Roberts family. Picture: Iain Gillespie

Take five with Charlie and Coleen Roberts, owners CharCol Springs

Q: What made you interested in farming eggs at your Manjimup farm?

A: We were rotational grazing our cattle through the fruit orchard and soon noticed that we could also graze chickens behind the cattle. The chickens clean up all the bugs and grubs and spread the cow manure out and is highly beneficial to the soil in a natural way. We quickly realised that the eggs being produced were of amazing quality. With some more research we figured out that we could operate the same sustainable system on a larger scale over our 70ha pastured paddocks with a herd of cattle followed by 2500 chickens. The results we are already getting with our soil health are just incredible. With this continual rotational style of farming we became not only graziers of cattle but also graziers of chickens.

Q: How does your farm differ from others?

A: Our whole ethos is based around sustainability, farming for the future, farming for our children. If we don't care for the land in this generation what will we be handing over to the next generation?

Q: What are the some of the challenges you have faced?

A: Educating the consumer on what pastured eggs are, how they are produced and establishing the category of pastured eggs on the market in earlier times were our greatest challenges. Now the demand is far greater than we can produce.

Q: What is your family's favourite meal to make with eggs?

A: We all laugh at the fact that we should write a book titled 501 Ways To Eat Eggs. We are always looking for different ways to eat them but our favourite is truffled egg — an egg that has been infused with a truffle for a few days then poached or fried. It's absolutely delicious, but very seasonal.

Q: What future plans to do you have for the farm?

A: Not only to educate our children on this sustainable style of farming but also to educate other farmers who wish to learn these practices through workshops where we give them all the tools they require to get started in pastured egg production.

Region's champions

Fresh local produce shines on shelf, finds HERMIONE STOTT

How fresh is fresh when it comes to fruit and veg? Five days? Three days?

Gilbert's Fresh Market strive for the freshest produce available, which means that more often than not the apple on their shelf was hanging on the tree the day before.

"If we order on a Monday then it's with us by the Tuesday," said principal John Opferkuch. "Freshness is our number one priority, our bible, and is why our customers keep coming back."

Mr Opferkuch said his four stores in Midland, Willetton, Mandurah and Hilton were purely a fresh fruit and veg market and Genuinely Southern Forests produce was his produce of choice.

"They are fantastic to deal with and the produce is just so, so good," he said.

"Here in WA, being so isolated, we are really extremely lucky to have the right climate to be growing



Rachel Klumpp and John Opferkuch. Picture: Danella Bevis

such amazing fruit and vegetables." Mr Opferkuch said not only did his customers appreciate the freshness, and flavour of Southern Forests produce but its lifespan was much longer once it left the store.

"It's not unusual for it to last up to two weeks and is still perfect to eat," he said.

Wembley and Leederville Supa IGA produce manager/buyer Tim Jagot said he had found his customers had become more aware of the brand and the quality of produce it

provided.

"In particular we sell a large amount of Southern Forests avocados with repeat sales making it hard to keep up with demand," he said.

"Local means higher quality as the produce hasn't had to travel large distances to get to our stores, and support of local farmers is key to the ongoing viability of farming in WA."

He said helping to identify and communicate the source of produce was paramount to the success of his businesses as more customers sought local.

"Southern Forests are well on the road to vastly improving the 'paddock to plate' path through better logistics and marketing and in doing so will help customers perceptions and understanding of what is locally available," he said.

Mr Opferkuch has worked collaboratively and successfully with Southern Forests growers for the good part of 10 years and said he was always on the lookout to build and create new relationships.

"We really believe in the region and its produce and will continue to support them in any way we can," he said.



Deryck Kippen, Craig Irons & Tim Jagot. Picture: Iain Gillespie



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