



Braidwood area local food producers PART ONE

The local produce scene in and around Braidwood is thriving. BWD set out to feature all our local producers but discovered the task too great for one issue. We missed catching up with many producers, sorry, we'll get you next time ...



Brian Carle, 'the man with the bell' explains how the farmers' market came to be

In 2013 the Braidwood Farmers' Market was launched by a dedicated group of people. Farmers' markets were in the early stages of development in Eastern Australia. The key objective of the market in Braidwood was to only sell products that were grown or made locally in the

2622 postcode area. Some limited exceptions were made because of customer's requests, like seafood from Bateman's Bay.

It was also planned that the market would provide an outlet to sell local products, plus it would provide local small producers with a low-risk opportunity to develop business and production plans for their successful small businesses in primary production.

There is a big difference between selling a small amount of items in an ad hoc way and having small business that develops ongoing connection with the customers. To be able to regularly supply products throughout the whole year requires significant planning, long and short term — because in Braidwood we have defined four seasons with extremes in weather.

Successful marketers quickly realised that a customer following became dependant on them being able to regularly supply their customer needs. This meant being a regular stall holder with quality products, acceptable quantities and a variety of products.

The market hosts on average twelve stall holders every first and third Saturday mornings of each month in the National Theatre. A wide range of products are sold. Regular market customers have realised the benefits in purchasing products at the Braidwood Farmers' Market. The items are fresh, most harvesting or production is carried out just hours before sale, hence great flavour and long shelf life.

There is also the advantage of being able to talk to the person who put the effort into growing what we eat. ■



Ken and Troy Harrison explain the challenges facing medium-sized producers. Ken leads off ...

With our orchard, we've gone from probably 12,000 trees to about 2,000. We're only producing around ten per cent of what we used to. The environment played a bit of a part in that, but main the thing was economics.

There are a lot of bigger orchards these days. Out west through the Riverland — Swan Hill, Shepparton, they're just bigger and produce more. Basically, we couldn't compete in the same markets as they were going into — the supermarkets. So we downsized and we just do farmers markets now.

We do a lot more hay now than what

we used to because we've changed the orchards over to lucerne and paddocks. We still do sheep and cattle as we've always done. We've got more sheep now than we used to.

I hope that farmers markets thrive, not only for our sake, because we deal with three markets. We do Capital Region Farmers Market in Canberra, the Southside Farmers Market in Canberra, and the Braidwood Farmers Market.

We still work hard though. You've got to be there at six o'clock in the morning setting up. You're picking it to go to the farmers market, as well as you're getting it ready. And then you've got to control it all — that's the biggest problem.

At the markets I do the stone fruit and Troy's doing the vegies. We help him out and he helps us out, and it all works out together. Our stone fruit goes

Harrison & Sons

Generations of Harrisons have farmed at Araluen

November/December, and just into the first week in January, usually. We stop then but we do lucerne whenever it's ready. So if it's ready at the same time as the fruit is, you've got to do it all.

When the jobs are there, you just have to do them. You just have to go a bit harder and work a bit longer to get through them. That's just how it happens.

Troy: We start planting in September. It's mainly seedlings, but some things we direct-seed into the ground. We do cucumbers, capsicum, eggplant, tomatoes, pumpkins, potatoes, sweet corn, broccoli, cauliflowers, cabbages and probably some I've missed.

I do farmers markets all year round. That's the first and third Saturdays in Braidwood and then January through to April I also do two farmers markets in Canberra. That's enough for me because otherwise it spreads you a bit thin — farmers markets being on the weekends. If I do Braidwood that means I'm not in Canberra and that means I have to rely on family members.

I'm at the stage now where I probably can't put any more in without employing someone.

They're pretty strict at some markets about the seller being the actual grower. And that's good — I'd rather that than someone's neighbour getting a heap of tomatoes, going over there and selling them.

Once people come to the farmers market and try our produce, they come back and say, "so that's what stone fruit's meant to taste like" or, "that's what corn's meant to taste like. How come the supermarket stuff doesn't taste like that?"

But it's getting them there in the first place — whether we're competitive enough. On most things we are, but when the supermarkets does a special on, say, broccoli or something, and they do it at \$2.50 a kilo, you just can't compete with that. But once they come to the farmers market they're more on board, I think, once they've tasted the produce and know how good it is.

We know our food is better, it's just convincing everybody else to come and try it and find out. ■

TROY AND 5TH GENERATION HARRISON, ISABELLE.

