



The importance of being appellated

Scott Watkins-Sully makes the (quality) case

“I can’t stand people who do not take food seriously!”

Oscar Wilde

WHILST THE NUTRITIONAL value of food is now most definitely being taken seriously with particular reference to processed foods, there’s still relatively little serious consideration given by the average consumer in regards to where fresh produce comes from.

Even some of the more discerning consumers are satisfied simply with the term organic, but organic doesn’t necessarily give any indication that produce has been grown in a zone that best suits it in terms of geography or climate, both of which have a critical effect upon nutritional value and flavour.

We live on a continent of vast climatic and geographical diversity, on which there’s immense scope to cultivate close to every variety of produce known to human kind. But does Australian agriculture take advantage of the opportunity to utilise a variety of regional characteristics to produce not vast quantities to meet an overzealous demand for particular foods, but quality produce of high nutritional value and flavour?

It’s a very easy question to answer; the production of fruit and vegetables is largely concentrated into giant irrigation schemes, where food is grown to meet the demand of supermarkets at a price that’s deemed right for the mass market. Produce diversity and mass production has been achieved, but it has come at a

cost. The compromises are always around nutrition and flavour.

How then, do we meet the demand? First we must ask if such a demand for a uniform selection of produce day in, day out, all year round is all together necessary. In Clive Hamilton’s visionary 2005 publication *Affluenza*, it was noted that as a nation, we throw away in excess of \$5.9 billion worth of food each year! That’s a staggering figure.

Could it be that a superficial view of food, a lack of seriousness if you like, evolving from a failure to see fresh produce as a precious commodity has evolved from a predominance of cheap, perennially available, often flavourless fruit, vegetables, meat and fish? If produce availability was on a more seasonal and regional basis, presenting the consumer with food that was considerably more flavour-some due to geographical and climatic aspects, would a greater emphasis be placed upon its value?

Is it possible to convince the consumer to spend less money on the latest LED, 3D television set, even at it’s made in China bargain price and spend more money on a higher standard of produce? It’s all down to marketing, just as it is for the latest high-tech consumer gadgetry!

This leads us to another curly question; how do small producers afford to mass market. Enter the appellation. Not a remote U.S mountain range where the lowcal fowlk congratulate each other with high sixes, but a system that protects and promotes regional produce by introducing guidelines that set the bar in terms of quality.

There are references to an appellation like system going back to the Bible in regards to the wines of Samaria and

Jerzeel, which are located in what is today known as the West Bank (I believe that amongst some Christian factions, there’s still a misrepresented commandment around “thou shalt not appellate oneself on the sabbath”). Modern appellation has its roots in France going back to 1935 with the introduction of Institut National des Appellations d’Origine.

Whilst appellation is generally associated with the wine industry, the system can be just as effectively applied to other non vinous produce. An appellation is essentially a geographical indication and standard, which can ensure that produce or wine styles from within a region are most suited to its teroir.

Only if produce meets particular criteria including geographical boundaries, yields and quality notes will fresh or value added produce be deemed to be of a standard befitting the appellation’s marque.

What’s that I hear? The disgruntled murmuring of the good old Australian “they can’t f#!@ng tell me what do” brigade. The “my father and grandfather fought barefooted in 15 world wars for me to grow what the f@*! I like” squad. It astounds me that with such a fervent opposition to conformity, we have managed to become the most red tape entangled, Rum Corpesque revenue raising democracy on the planet. Red tape and revenue that favours the mass producers and food retail duopoly.

There is nothing about an appellation to control what an individual grows or value adds. The system simply chooses the produce or products that benefit most from the region’s geography and climate, which are ideally some of the best available to a wider market as a net result of those factors. Produce or products that don’t meet the criteria required in order to wear the appellation’s marque would simply be sold without it. There’s nothing to say that a particular non appellation product can’t be recognised by the appellation system through proof of consistent quality over time.

The obvious benefits of growing or making produce that satisfies the appellations requirements, is that a small levy that is paid in return for permission to use the marque, goes back into marketing, which can eventually lead to a region being highly noted for specific produce of superior quality.

Unless an appellation is government run and to a certain degree funded (Babe 3, The Aviation Adventure), it’s

vital that appellations are managed by those who are best served by their integrity; the growers and value adders. That way it’s upheld that an appellation marque is applied only when a strict criteria has been met, not simply when a levy has been paid.

Palerang has great potential to develop a successful system of appellation, which in time would generate significant interest in the region. Let’s look at the region’s wine as an example. Just recently, the Half Moon Vineyard, which is located at Mongarlowe, picked up the Best Wine In Show gong for its 2010 Riesling at the 2012 Canberra Wine Show; no mean feat given the stiff opposition.

A number of vineyards in this region are producing Riesling of the highest standard, so too are they producing excellent Pinot Gris. On the other hand, pinot noir is a little hit or miss (with exceptions) and local shiraz largely fails to excite me, simply due to the age of the vines, which only father time can remedy.

A Palerang appellation should in my

opinion, take in Riesling and Pinot Gris with a view to possibly including Pinot Noir. Whilst Shiraz may improve with time, it may never reach an overall standard that warrants inclusion. It is after all critical to the integrity of an appellation that anything, which carries its marque, is of a standard that represents it well in the wider market.

This view is of course just a personal one, tendered as a means of providing an example; after all, it takes more than the opinion of a solitary hack to set the standards of an appellation!

Other produce from the region also has great potential to be included. Stone fruit from Araluen, garlic, beef and cider are being produced in significant volumes. A regional marque that’s synonymous with a high standard would almost certainly guide discerning customers to the region, in pursuit of quality. Our region has so much to offer in terms of food tourism and the community has much to gain from it in terms of economics.

Quite possibly a recognised system of

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