



Tobellie Hill Produce

Erin Cooper and Dan Mundy. Erin leads off ...

We've always been really interested in feeding ourselves healthy, homegrown food. We've also always had a desire to buy a bit of land and live self-sufficiently and sustainably. We got the opportunity to do that in 2014 when we bought our property at Kindervale. We have about an acre of vegetables. Our place is completely off grid and once again, we're growing our own food. We have three kids and we know how

FAMILY FOOD

good it is for them to eat homegrown, chemical free food. We thought, why not share it with everybody else? So that's what we're doing. And we really enjoy it.

Dan Mundy: My parents are down at Araluen. Both sides of the family come from there, from way back. They've got a beef cattle operation there. My great grandfather used to grow corn for Kellogg's way back in the day. But our family has always grown veggies too and we always had a good veggie garden at home. I know that home grown produce is so much better than the mass produced stuff that you get in Coles, Woollies and those sort of places.

Erin: We just can't eat it anymore. Even if we go to a restaurant in town, or somewhere that isn't using locally grown produce, we can tell the difference.

We're vegetable snobs now.

We are founding members of the Canberra region small farm co-operative. As a group we've got plans in place to encourage changes in the way local restaurants source their produce. That's where the big gap is, really — in the restaurant, café industry.



[ABOVE] THE FARM AT KINDERVALE
[LEFT] IN THE PROVISIONS COURTYARD;
DAN, TOBY, ELLIE, ERIN AND MOLLIE.

Dan: Down the south coast, they've got a really good community amongst the growers. They help each other out. If someone's got a new poly tunnel that needs to go up, then everyone chips in and helps.

Erin: A small group of us got together and applied for 'Farming Together' funding to get a co-op in this region up and running. And that's what we did. One of the big things that we're trying to do is change the way that chefs in our local restaurants are working — the produce that they're using.

We're looking to get more members in the co-op. So if anyone's interested, get in touch with us because we would definitely like to get more members from this region. Having that community can make your farming a little bit easier and a little bit more financially viable. We sell from the Provisions courtyard every Saturday. We also sell in Queanbeyan, we sell through Southern Harvest as well and we have our own individual produce boxes. People can get in touch with us to order. We do deliveries in Braidwood, Queanbeyan and Bungendore.



FERTILITY

Jillamatong beef

Martin Royds says better land makes better food

My grandparents had never ploughed 90% of Jillamatong. Some had been ploughed back in the 1880s for wheat and it had then turned into a jungle of Poa Tussock, Cocky's Bootlace, little bit of Kangaroo grass and then a lot of native grasses, some Microlaena, and Poa tussock ... a lot of Poa tussock.

It was fairly native, but they'd set-stocked it so a lot of the good grasses had been chewed out, and it was a bit unproductive. When I took over I ploughed some of the paddocks that you couldn't even drive through, the Poa tussocks were on pedestals, and sowed them to introduced native grasses. I've spent the last 20 years trying to get native grasses back into that mix.

I'm now over sowing a lot of the pastures with a mix of eight different grasses, forbes and clovers to try and build the biodiversity up. I'm concentrating on building biodiversity in the pasture. In an upcoming project we're going to look at the soil microme, that's the amount of fungi and life in the soil which is the secret to building a healthier soil.

Meeting Peter Andrews had a big influence on my farm practice. We're putting a whole series of chain of ponds back in, and then working out from the creek putting contours all across the farm to slow the water, and then compost heaps in those, having water going through them and using gravity and capillary action to spread the fertility from those compost heaps.

Apart from soil carbon and biodiversity, Jillamatong's main product is beef cattle — kilos of beef, that's what we keep a track of. The cattle only stay on the farm if they are putting on weight. As soon as the conditions mean that I can't put weight on my stock, I try and take them off and let the land rest and recover.

This is quite different to how we used to farm. We once just worried about our breeders and the numbers, and didn't really take a note of what was happening with the pasture, and definitely didn't take any note of whether the soil was covered, and being fed and having its nutrients replenished.



For too long society has pushed the line, 'bigger is better' — and we've ended up with bigger humans and I don't think they're better. I think it'd be a lot more rewarding for consumers if we start paying farmers for quality food and for the environmental benefit they're having on the land. Then you'll get more people back on the land and the small, passionate farmer is going to be far better at producing more quality food, so socially it's better too.

Supermarkets were forced by legislation to put cents per kilo on food to stop conning the consumer with bigger boxes. If we now push to have cents per nutrients, then the consumer would be able to clearly see whether they were actually buying a whole lot of sugar and salt, or actually buying the carotene, the omega-3s or whatever.

My goal is to see supermarkets display cents per nutrients displayed on the shelves, and then the consumer would start buying quality food, and that would then drive the market.

As soon as the supermarkets found that people were wanting to buy quality food, they'd suddenly have to say to their suppliers, "Hey, hang on, we don't want weight anymore, we want quality", and the farmers would be relieved, because I know a lot of big vegetable farmers who don't eat what they produce because they know it's crap. It sits on the shelf and doesn't rot because it's just salt and water, but they would never eat it or feed it to their kids.

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