

# MILK & HONEY

## Markets flow with goodness

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### Potatoes and more at Meadows

MEADOWS'S growers, brothers Wes and Trentyn Hart (pictured), have successfully adapted their farming business for farmers' markets.

Eight years ago, the third generation market gardeners grew two potato varieties for wholesale markets. They now produce 15 different types of vegetables, including 20 varieties of potato.

In the same year that the Wilunga Farmers' Market was established, the Harts grew a bumper crop, but prices were rock bottom. They decided to try selling their produce at the newly-opened market, and never looked back.

Customers

begin requesting hard-to-find, old-style or gourmet potato varieties, and the Harts obliged, also making the decision to broaden their product range. Hart's Vegetables are now sold at both the Wilunga and Adelaide Showground farmers' markets.

Only enough vegetables are grown to supply the markets, so waste is dramatically reduced.

Wes said the farmers' market model suited his business now that he was getting older, and that he enjoyed talking to people at the markets and gaining feedback directly from customers.

## Farmers markets a growth

BY SARAH SLEE

ADELAIDE could easily support five weekly farmers' markets, and more growers are needed to supply new markets, says Adelaide Showground Farmers Market CEO, Zannie Flanagan.

There are several markets operating in South Australia, but only one in metropolitan Adelaide. Ms Flanagan is working toward the establishment of more city markets as part of the AFM's three-year strategic plan.

The proposal presents significant opportunities for current and potential growers to develop or expand their businesses.

There is strong demand for local produce, and consumers from as far away as Gawler travel to the Goodwood market in Goodwood every week.

"Once consumers try farmers' markets, they become addicted to the quality and taste of the food, and the social experience. Demand is also driven by environmental concerns and 'food fear'. People want to know where their food is coming from," Ms Flanagan said.

The only thing stopping the rollout of more markets in metropolitan Adelaide and throughout the State, was a shortage of growers with

### Smartfacts

- Strong demand for SA produce
- More stallholders needed
- Weekly cash flow for growers

suitable production systems for farmers' markets.

Growers require an ability to supply produce on a weekly basis, and single-commodity growers are encouraged to consider diversifying to include a broader product range.

Farmers' markets offer a number of advantages over other selling options, including the opportunity to value-add raw commodities, conduct market research, trial new products, promote brands, and gain direct feedback from consumers.

Growers are also able to increase business cash flow and, in most cases, achieve higher prices for their produce.

Among the 100-odd stallholders at AFM, many supply other farmers' markets, and some have developed their business specifically to supply these markets.

"A lot of small enterprises find it impossible to get into the big distribution channels, so farmers' markets can be a start-up opportunity for small business," Ms Flanagan said.

She said that markets were not limited to small-

scale growers. Large producers took particular advantage to sell products with a short shelf-life that made them unsuitable for supermarkets, or for interstate or export markets.

"To be sustainable, farmers' markets needed to supply consumers with much of their weekly food requirements and offer a diverse range of products, especially non-value-added commodities like fruit, vegetables, meat and milk.

Ms Flanagan said the key to vibrant, successful markets was healthy levels of competition and availability of produce that was affordable for ordinary people.

"We are not interested in running boutique gourmet markets where ordinary people can't afford to buy. However, it is clear that many consumers will pay more for produce that is certified organic, biodynamic or free-range," she said.

Establishment of new farmers' markets would enable current stallholders to expand their distribution - but more stallholders would also be needed to fill demand.

There was an opportunity for growers to develop business models for those markets, but it was important for them to have assurance that the markets were professionally operated and sustainable in the long-term.

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The AFM has adopted a membership model that encourages community members to take ownership of the market through the purchase of membership.

AFM management facilitates a relationship of mutual trust between producers and consumers, by ensuring the quality and source of produce, and addressing customer concerns.

Growers apply annually for stallholder renewal, with the condition that the producer - or someone with a good knowledge of production - man the stall at all times. New stallholders are inspected on farm, and stringent auditing is ongoing.

It's important that authenticity is maintained to ensure the consumer has confidence that the food does, in fact, come from where the stallholder says it does," Ms Flanagan said.

She encouraged potential stallholders to contact AFM. "We want to get the message out that supplying farmers' markets provide an alternative business model, and we are here to help."



### Strong passion for local produce bears fruit

ZANNIE Flanagan (pictured) has her sights set on the establishment of a network of farmers' markets across metropolitan Adelaide.

After establishing South Australia's first farmers' market at Wilunga, Zannie was engaged by the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society to establish a non-profit, community-owned-and-operated farmers' market, based on the Wilunga model. She now heads the Adelaide Showground Farmers Market as CEO.

Originally from New Zealand, Zannie has called the Fleurieu

Peninsula home for the past 30 years, and been involved in the food industry since the early 1980s.

As a restaurateur, she put much effort into creating menus that reflected the local Fleurieu environment. It was the start of a life-long mission to bring local produce to the community, and to help ensure South Australia's food-producing farmland - and the State's image as a food-and-wine-producing region - was valued and protected.

"When I arrived on the Fleurieu, I couldn't believe how

beautiful it was. But there was nowhere to eat or buy local food," Zannie said.

"When I learned about farmers' markets, it was the perfect option. It fitted well with people's concerns about the environment and food security, and kept money in the region."

"The Wilunga market has had an incredible effect on the economics of that town. And when real estate agents start putting 'within walking distance of farmers market' on their property advertisements, you know you've made it."

### Local support leads to national success

THE Fleurieu Milk Company is a local success story that started out selling produce at farmers' markets in 2006.

Less than four years later, the company supplies 620 stores across South Australia, and sells milk in Darwin, Sydney and Canberra.

Despite runaway success, Fleurieu Milk Company products can still be found at farmers' markets at Wilunga, Adelaide Showground and Mount

Barker.

Alan Sienkewicz of Wise Choice Healthy Foods, along with Mandy and John Maidment (pictured), are distributors for the Fleurieu Milk Company.

Alan says farmers' markets were invaluable for introducing the product to consumers.

"One of the main things we did was give away samples of milk for tasting. People appreciated the quality, and would invariably buy some on the

day. Many of those people became regular customers."

In addition to the opportunity to gain direct customer feedback and network with other producers, selling at the markets helped Fleurieu Milk Company to establish its brand. It wasn't long before customers were requesting the company's milk at their local supermarkets.

"It's been fantastic for our business," Alan said.

