

21 February 2017

To all SAGE Farmers Market Stall Holders

It has been a super long time since the last newsletter, I'm sorry! I did actually write one back in December, but then forgot to print it out – duh. I hope to get back to more regular communication this year.

Sydney Weekender

You'll have noticed a film crew and perhaps recognised Mike Whitney here today. They're filming an episode of Sydney Weekender, featuring our market and a couple of the stall holders who supply Gundry Store and The River restaurant. They may ask to talk to you on camera. If so... woohoo!... Obviously, it's not compulsory. Please participate as much or as little as you like.

Eurobodalla Shire Council Rural Producers Advisory Committee

Arising from the recently adopted Rural Lands Strategy, Council has established a new committee to help deliver many of the recommendations in the strategy. I applied and was selected for the committee, so I am now in a position to represent the interests of all of our stall holders on the matters we discuss.

At our first meeting last Friday, we identified a few issues that we think the committee can tackle sooner rather than later. These include setting up a collaborative marketing brand for food grown in the Eurobodalla, which will also provide a means to disseminate information to interested producers elsewhere who might consider establishing themselves here.

We also briefly discussed action that could be taken on how to help growers access land through secure leasing arrangements and also aid access to water, which is subject to the same restrictive regulation as drier regions and might not be appropriate for our coastal geography.

Another issue raised of particular relevance to the market is the matter of food regulations for value-added products and how the cost of compliance can stifle business ideas and new products. I hope that this committee will provide a very direct channel of communication to the various departments of Council that recognise the importance of our smaller producers being able to thrive and grow. This is a great opportunity to have a voice inside Council.

The chair of the committee, Mayor Liz Innes, emphasised that all rural producers are encouraged to bring their issues to the table as well, to see how they can be addressed within the framework of the strategy. So I encourage you to grab me for a chat at anytime, if you want to add your perspective. I'm more than happy to chat outside of market hours, so feel free to call me on 0413 920 620, or send an email to markets@sageproject.org.au.

I would really value your insight and would very much like to have your input to help me better understand the full picture of what our local food system needs to prosper.

Farm/site visits

I have started booking stall holders in for inspections. We make every 3rd Wednesday morning available to conduct these visits, so this year I hope we can get through the remaining stall holders who we haven't yet been to. I think we underestimated how ambitious we were when we decided to do this, but it's turned out to be a very important and valuable aspect of our market. We don't just claim "authentic!", we demonstrate it with the producer profiles we publish on the website.

It's a real pleasure and a privilege to visit everyone's farm or business and we're grateful for you taking the time to accommodate us.

Stall holder representatives on SFM Committee

I realised that I didn't get around to updating everyone on our new stall holder representatives on the committee. They are Kirsti from Old Mill Road BioFarm and Emma from Mogendoura Farm. If you wish to raise any issues at all and would prefer to speak to a fellow stall holder, please approach either Kirsti or Emma and they can bring it to the committee.

Of course, you can talk to any of us at anytime and in case you don't know who else is on the committee (other than me), Stuart Whitelaw is our chair, Penny Cook is our secretary, Geoff Scott is our treasurer, Sandra Makdessi is our e-market coordinator and Sara Grant is our customer representative. Our ears are always ready to receive your thoughts.

e-Market

We have now introduced delivery to Moruya and Broulee/Mossy Point and hope that this service will encourage more people who wouldn't normally come to the market to shop online for local food. This summer, we have had our highest number of products as well as producers using the e-market.

Interest from customers in the e-market increases as the range of choices they are given increases, so the more producers who participate, the more potential new trade we can attract. You might not sell a lot via the e-market at first, but if we maintain a similar level of product choice, sales should increase.

While more tourists and locals are recognising the value of using the e-market to avoid the queues in peak times, the real point of the e-market is to attract new customers who can't get to the market before 5pm (or at all), so providing a wide range of great products is important to attract their business. We have a long way to go before local food reaches saturation in this community, but we have to keep innovating to get to those new customers.

Talk to me or Sandra if you would like to join the e-market or expand your range of available products.

Kate Raymond
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on behalf of the
SAGE Farmers Market Committee

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