



OPENING THE GATE

Inspiring producers to pursue growth by sharing of local success stories

BELLARINE SMOKED FISH COMPANY



Fish preservation through smoking, drying or pickling has been around for centuries. The Basques have their salt cod, you'll find pickled herring in Northern Europe, and locally the Indigenous population are said to have smoked eels and fish in hollowed-out native trees. It's a culinary pursuit steeped in history, and right here in the Geelong region there are two people making a mark with their very own hot smoked fish.

Ask Jarron Mason why people should eat his smoked fish and he'll tell you that many of their competitors' products are full of additives, nitrates and are often artificially coloured and flavoured. The Bellarine Smoked Fish Company uses none of these, instead employing only the most traditional of methods: A combination of fish, salt and woodsmoke. Jarron, a Kiwi, explains that smoking fish in New Zealand is practically a national past-time, and he was surprised to find a lack of quality product here in Australia. Jarron got to work; he commissioned his father and an old engineering friend to build

him a commercial grade smoker, and from there a unique enterprise was born.

Things moved slowly at first, and the red tape was quite prohibitive. The Bellarine Smoked Fish Company is considered a 'further processor' and therefore is carefully regulated by PrimeSafe (the regulatory body governing compliance with the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Meat Industry Act 1993). Jarron and his partner Pamela both agree that the start-up costs, registration fees and local laws compliance eroded their initial finances and capacity to invest in marketing. They were forced to seek finance in order to cope with the capital expenditure and legalities of starting a food production business. It's a story all too familiar for many small business operators. Their equipment also needed work and further modifications. Failure was not an option, however, and Jarron elected to continue working his regular job, albeit at reduced hours, in order to earn the money they needed to keep going.



“Employing only the most traditional methods.”

To an extent the brand has grown organically; free samples, and a presence at countless farmers’ markets across regional and metropolitan Victoria helped get the name out there. The unique taste, and their commitment to a natural smoking process, was enough to secure repeat business. Jarron and Pamela both agree that the many free samples they gave away got people talking and triggered sales. Word of mouth referrals and high praise through social media tends to unite foodies, and the Bellarine Smoked Fish Company have experienced their fair share of both.

The Bellarine Smoked Fish Company cemented their place in Sydney and the wider NSW market when they entered the Sydney Fine Foods Festival Awards in 2016 and took home a Gold Medal for their smoked salmon pate and a Silver Medal for their smoked rainbow trout. These achievements within the first two years of operation provided an excellent foundation on which to grow their profile, and Pamela is now working hard to develop the wholesale arm of the business. She already has a stable of cafes, delicatessens and restaurants stocking Bellarine Smoked Fish products. Part of the challenge is finding ways to connect with retailers and hospitality venues, but Pamela is always eager to pick up the phone and make an introduction.



HIGHLIGHTS:

- ① A niche market where there is a gap in supply of quality product.
- ② Local regulations and start-up costs were prohibitive.
- ③ Food awards have provided an excellent foundation on which to build their profile.
- ④ Farm gate offerings in an already well-established food and wine area.
- ⑤ Offered lots of taste samples and let the product speak for itself!



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“Word of mouth referrals and high praise through social media.”



The Bellarine Smoked Fish Company is now making the transition from farmers’ market favourite to a permanent farm-gate experience 25km south of Geelong, alongside Portarlington Road. The smoking operation and new farm-gate shop is located on the thriving Bellarine Peninsula amongst wineries and with sweeping views eastward. They sell smoked salmon, rainbow trout and gemfish, as well as their very popular and award-winning smoked salmon pate.

This evolution in the business strategy is the pivotal next step, and Jarron and Pamela hope to engage an even greater customer base. Tourists and locals alike will be able to experience the delicious flavour of hot smoked fish and pate, as well as having Jarron on hand to answer any questions about the smoking process. It will appeal to those seeking to eat something that is traditional, healthy and free from artificial additives. It is anticipated that the door sales will continue to spread the word, and now with the permanent signage erected, Jarron and Pamela only expect things to improve, particularly over summer with the increased road users and visitors to the Bellarine’s great beaches, restaurants and popular wineries.



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