



# OPENING THE GATE

Inspiring producers to pursue growth by sharing of local success stories

## Casuarina Farm



Having studied Naturopathy, Kirsten was well aware of the benefits derived from eating a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables and free from chemicals. When her husband Adrian fell ill early in their relationship, the couple made their own personal shift towards a diet more focused on fresh foods produced using organic and biodynamic methods. They saw an opportunity to help improve the health of others as well, by growing and sourcing organic produce and making it easily available to people in the Geelong region.

Kirsten and Adrian started small, with a letter drop in their local community advertising a weekly service delivering boxes of mixed vegetables organically grown on their farm. The initial response saw 20 customers taking up their offer, and demand has grown strongly into a customer base that now sees over 200 boxes per week being delivered to customers from Lorne to the Bellarine Peninsula, and north into the Golden Plains district. Additionally, up to 100t of potato, onion, cauliflower and brassicas are sold through a distributor at the Epping Markets.

Casuarina Farm occupies 50 acres of farmland in Wurdi Buloc, and is part of the family farm that Adrian grew up on.

Kirsten and Adrian operate the business full time, along with a part-time employee who assists with administration, office tasks and social media, and further part-time employees who pack the vegetable boxes for weekly delivery to customers. Casuarina Farm also employs casual workers for the peak weeding and harvesting activities.

Driven by a desire to share good quality produce and provide foundational health benefits, Casuarina Farm's reward is the chance to provide good quality food to improve health.

Everything that Casuarina Farm offers has this proposition at the heart – not just from the strict adherence to using organic and biodynamic growing and harvesting techniques to provide the direct health benefits from their produce, but also in a more holistic sense by using their business as an opportunity to educate their customers and create a greater awareness of how food is grown and the seasonality of food, and how this can enhance its health effects.

Kirsten also sees Casuarina Farm as having a further function: to create connections and a sense of community with her customers.





*“Desire to share good quality produce.”*

Casuarina Farm chooses to focus on two key markets: wholesale biodynamic (potato, onion, cauliflower and brassicas), and families and individuals in the region who want high-quality produce.

When it comes to marketing to their wholesale customers, Casuarina Farm has chosen to use a distributor. Although they need to give up some of the margin on their produce to do so, their distributor is able to use its connections to reach a much wider network of customers, and as a result, provide a higher volume of sales than Kirsten and Adrian would manage if they tried to sell into this market directly. In addition to the increased volume, the number and complexity of transactions is significantly less than dealing directly with many wholesale customers, allowing the couple to focus their time and energy on the other areas of the business that require their attention.

Marketing to their local customers is far more interactive, and is heavily connected to Kirsten’s desire to create a community around Casuarina Farm, often referring to her customers as the “family”! The two main ways of reaching out are via the company’s Facebook page, and a weekly newsletter called “The Weekly Sprout” which is emailed to over 400 people. The Facebook page is instrumental in creating the sense of community, and growth through referral.



## HIGHLIGHTS:

①

Establish a business mission/purpose to give you a clear direction to keep striving towards.

②

Recognise when to put on the “business hat”, and be prepared to make objective decisions to ensure your business’ commercial viability.

③

Seek external support for specialised tasks – this will and allow you to concentrate on your core tasks as the business owner.



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## *“Create connections and a sense of community.”*

“The Weekly Sprout” newsletter contains information on the seasonality and availability of fruit and vegetables and is very important in educating and working with customers to understand that, by virtue of offering organic and biodynamic produce year-round, availability of all products at all times is not possible. As well as providing information on what will be available in upcoming weeks’ boxes, the newsletter also contains information on health, nutrition and community.

In addition to these daily and weekly mediums, the Casuarina Farm team still regularly attends local markets, and gives presentations at community events. Kirsten and Adrian find these events are a good opportunity to interact with likeminded people, plus they provide an opportunity to reach out to new people and make them aware of the benefits of better produce.

Kirsten and Adrian have recognised that it is now time to start growing their marketing strategy. In the past they have found it difficult to dedicate time to a more formal marketing strategy, and have found the idea very daunting and overwhelming. They have now employed someone part-time to assist with this side of the business, including focusing on developing their branding and packaging and creating a website.

Kirsten and Adrian started Casuarina Farm as a business that would match their lifestyle and core beliefs, and on this point they have achieved amazing outcomes. Balanced with this has been the need to, at the right times, “put on the business hat”, and they have taken the next steps of engaging

assistance to develop their website and branding. In doing so they have made sure it is consistent with the foundations of their business, for example avoiding the use of promotions and giveaways, as they feel these would not fit with their community feel.

Kirsten’s final advice is to do what you love and do it well. Be authentic and offer a good product. This results in a great experience for customers, creating a win-win for the customer and the business, where the financial rewards are a by-product of doing what you love.



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