



## OPENING THE GATE

Inspiring producers to pursue growth by sharing of local success stories

### Pennyroyal Raspberry Farm



17 years ago, Mike and Katrine decided to swap their busy Melbourne lifestyle for the picturesque hills of Pennyroyal. One of their favourite weekend haunts was the Pennyroyal Raspberry Farm, and over time their visits evolved into regularly helping the owners around the farm. Little did they know, a casual comment expressing their interest in buying the property when the owners retired would be a turning point. Several weeks later they were the proud owners of the Pennyroyal Raspberry Farm, and since then they have been living the life they had always dreamed of.

Utilising Mike's background as an environmental consultant and Katrine's experience in the food industry, the couple has expanded the business significantly, diversifying the range of products offered, increasing the focus on organic farming techniques and incorporating complementary local ingredients into their products.

During berry season (December to January), the farm is open for pick-your-own berries; the property's tea house hosts hundreds of visitors per day in this peak business period. Outside of this period, Mike and Katrine harvest and supply berries and a range of preserves to many local restaurants

and retailers, run a bed and breakfast on the property, and increasingly Mike is also producing apple ciders and berry-infused gins.

Several common themes run through the berries, preserves, ciders and gins that Mike and Katrine produce. Firstly, as far as possible they source ingredients from their own farm or other local farms in the Pennyroyal region to minimise food miles. Mike proudly points out that many ingredients are counted in food metres! Secondly, they focus on consistent delivery of high-quality products to their customers through using organically-grown, fresh ingredients, and production techniques that are precise and highly controlled. Finally, Mike and Katrine are passionate about the provenance of their products – allowing the customer to fully appreciate the origins of the ingredients, most of which have come in from the farm on the back of a tractor!

So why are these themes so important to Pennyroyal Raspberry Farm? According to Mike, the basis of their mission is to provide products that are “real and honest, with integrity and clear provenance.”



*“Celebrating where the produce has come from.”*

Pennyroyal Raspberry Farm continues to experience healthy growth, leveraging the public’s ever-increasing interest in quality local produce, and improved access to the area with the opening of the ring road around Geelong.

Reaching out to this tourism market has been achieved in a number of ways, such as membership (and in some cases being founding members) of local industry groups and publications, including the Otways Harvest Trail, Tourism Victoria, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Limited and the local Pennyroyal business hub. Also critical has been ensuring the local Tourist Information Centres carry information on the farm, and positively engaging with local Tourism Officers as another avenue to reach new customers.

Some of the noticeable customer trends are the significant numbers of repeat or referral customers, and the geographical diversity of visitors to the farm. Customers often make the pilgrimage to Pennyroyal as a part of their summer holidays in the region, and new customers often visit after friends and family share stories of their wonderful experiences. These visitors are increasingly coming from areas other than Melbourne, with international visitor numbers expanding in recent years. Mike is able to pinpoint two particular visitors who have impacted this increase: a Singaporean visitor



## HIGHLIGHTS:

- 1 Celebrate your products’ provenance and share this with your customers.
- 2 Learn as much as you can about your industry in order to identify your opportunities and challenges.
- 3 Seek out industry, business and tourism groups and become an active participant.
- 4 Tap into the growing popularity of the Geelong region as a food destination.



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## “Significant numbers of repeat or referral customers.”

who is a travel agent in his home country, and a Japanese backpacker whose referrals have been instrumental in developing these international markets. A side benefit of the increase in international travellers is that their holiday periods are often offset to Australian holidays, which has extended the peak visitor period, usually confined to the Australian summer.

Whilst communicating with customers has proven difficult for this rural business due to variable internet coverage, they have persisted and found it an invaluable tool to connect with their customers. A website and Facebook page provide an outlet for their daily berry report in harvest season, telling customers which berries are ready to pick on any given day. The website and Facebook page can both be monitored for engagement levels, giving Mike and Katrine real-time feedback on what does and doesn't work, allowing them to learn and continuously improve their customer engagement strategies.

Mike's number one piece of advice is to stay true to your original purpose, which in Mike's case is “provenance”: Celebrating where the produce has come from – the growing and the clean production process. For Mike and Katrine it is clear that they offer more than just a pick-your-own berry farm; they seek to incite a passion in their customers for the berries and products they offer.

Second to this, Mike highlights their participation in industry groups and tourism bodies as having a huge positive effect,

not only as a way of learning from others, but as a way of increasing their networks and reaching new customers.

Mike advises new businesses to do their homework and know their industry inside out. An example given was the early recognition of the disease threat to the berry farm, leading Mike and Katrine to create extra distance between the visitor carpark and the farm itself, creating a disinfection barrier when entering the farm.

Finally, Mike recognises that our region is still growing in recognition as a food destination. This offers producers in the region a significant opportunity to grow. For Mike and Katrine, this means identifying new ways to engage with customers, including starting to offer master classes in cider- and gin-making. They see this as a turning point, and are looking forward to seeing where this next evolution takes their business and the region.



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