

27 July 2020

In conversation with a producer and member of the artisan agriculture project advisory group

To follow on the series of conversations with the Artisan Agriculture Project Advisory members, Sharon caught up with Carmel Masterson from Springmount Fine Foods.

Q: (SH) What brought you to wanting to run your own small-scale farm Springmount Fine Foods?

A: (CM) We always dreamed of making a living from the land we owned. Originally from Melbourne we moved to Springmount at the beginning of 2010. A few months later I was watching an episode of Master Chef, when they show cased in a dish the “Black Garlic” and this sparked my interest in this niche and unique product. This embarked my journey in how to turn a normal garlic clove to “black” with quickly discovering the commitment to 40 days in an oven to produce the sweet yet savoury flavour and soft caramelised texture.

In 2014, I resigned from my Office Administration position to focus with my husband and business partner Brett on the commercial operation. The first commercial small batch was 2015 and in 2016 we invested in our first commercial oven and we have been scaling up and diversifying the business over the last few years.



Q (SH): What does Springmount Fine Foods produce?

A (CM): Other than black garlic and black garlic drizzle which makes up 30% of our sales, we have a range of garlic vinaigrettes, sauces and fruit pastes.

Q (SH): Why do you think people have turned to gourmet and niche products direct from Farm producers rather than other market channels?

A (CM): I think people are more in tune with where their food comes from and they like to connect with the story of the product, the producers who make it, the raw products, the inputs that go in including understanding whether the product is grown sustainably and ethically. They look to the HONESTY of the product - hand made and crafted that are in limited or unique supply. COVID-19 has seen an increase in support for smaller brands and local economy.

Q (SH): What made you interested in the Hepburn Shire Artisan Agriculture Project and the project advisory group?

A (CM): To become a member of Project Advisory Group is a huge opportunity for Brett and me to learn from others and contribute to the wider artisan agriculture community. We love to share some our learnings of the hurdles and pitfalls during the startup phase so that we can support the wider community who may wish to enter farming.

Q (SH): What do you feel might be the top two learnings for local small-scale agricultural producers from the Global Pandemic of COVID-19?

A (CM): Number one would be food security and customers to understand the paddock to plate journey of where their food has come from. Number two producers need to diversify their market channels and consider what might need to happen with their market channels if one or more of these may close i.e. risk management of supply chains.

Q (SH) Where can people find out more about Springmount Fine Foods?

A (CM): We have a website which lists where our products are available, and you can follow us on Instagram. We are also regulars at the Talbot Markets although we recommend you check whether these are running depending on COVID-19 restrictions. Find out more at:

- www.springmountfinefoods.com.au
- www.instagram.com/springmount_fine_foods
- www.talbotfarmersmarket.org.au

Q (SH): Carmel, thank you so much for your precious time today and I have one last question. What do you see as the future opportunities for small scale agriculture producers in the Shire and Central Highlands?

A (CM): This is an exciting time and huge opportunities for Artisan Agriculture and food. We are a close-knit community in Hepburn Shire and with the support of this Project and a role like yours Sharon embedded in the Shire we will be able to have greater access to the tools and support to enhance the sector.

Hepburn and greater Central Highlands regions has access to healthy soils, water security and climate which will allow us to buffer some of the impacts of climate change. In addition, we are a major destination for food and tourism not only at a state but at a national and international level. We have set the foundation to really put the region at the forefront of small, scale, niche food and broader agriculture products.