



Country Noosa

PROMOTING A SUSTAINABLE RURAL FUTURE

Rural Enterprise Project



CONCEPT PAPER

Marketing, distribution, collaboration and networks

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Introduction

In recent years, agriculture in the Noosa region has seen a trend toward small-scale farming and niche products, in addition to an increasing number of lifestyle or hobby farms. This is a significant change in the regional industry, compared to the significant history of primary production, ranging from extensive timber milling and dairy farming and major production of bananas and some vegetables. Historical fragmentation of agricultural land has promoted the growing of produce that can be profitable on small lots, such as ginger, strawberries, hydroponic vegetables, and cut flowers.

One of the challenges that comes with this transition is finding alternatives for processing, marketing and distribution where economies of scale cannot be leveraged.

Discussions with community members, including growers, other landowners, and business owners during the initial workshops uncovered numerous opportunities for better collaboration and sharing of resources in the local region. This was particularly around the themes of shared food processing and distribution, cooperatives, share farming, rotational grazing, carbon farming opportunities, knowledge sharing, and spreading best practice in the community.

The following are a number of opportunities and avenues to connection between land owners, growing, customers and distributors in the region.

Case study: Mary Valley Country Harvest

The Mary Valley Country Harvest is a growers' cooperative, gathering a network of local producers in the Mary Valley and servicing businesses in throughout the Sunshine Coast region including Noosa and Gympie. The collective now sells produce via their webstore, partnered businesses, and individual customers at a stall at the Dagon growers' market and other markets each week.

The Co-operative was started in 2013 with 20 growers, prompted by an increase in demand for locally grown food in Gympie and the Sunshine Coast. Research indicated that local farmers were restricted by poor access to storage and handling facilities, high transport and distribution expenses, and lack of time to pursue new markets. The Mary Valley Economic Development Fund recommended that a food hub be



established to aggregate produce, assist in marketing, and provide a centralised point for distribution should be established. The Co-operative had expanded to 70 members by 2016, and were selling in Gympie and Dagon.

The cooperative supports a network of small growers, allowing profitability by finding markets for niche products, collaborating to meet production needs, providing training, support and mentoring, coordinating bulk purchase of farming material such as mulch, and facilitating the sharing of processing and storing facilities.

Growers share information and work together practically, organising joint educational activities to share new ideas and innovation, administering shared accreditation and organising bulk purchase and sharing materials and services. In this way, small-scale producers can alleviate some of the difficulties that come with their deficit in the economies of scale. One such producer is Double Creek Farm in Imbil, a certified chemical-free farm growing tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, and lettuce.

Customers range from cafes, retail outlets, cooperative stores, and neighbourhood buyers' groups, mostly in the form of \$30 bags of fresh produce according to season.

Case study: Maravista farm - Local produce and vertical integration

The Ogilvie group, owners of Rickys, Locale, Wood Fire Grill and Aromas Noosa, own and manage a macadamia farm nestled deep in the Cootharaba hinterland. The original heritage macadamia farm was operating in the 1930s but was revitalised in 1983, going into serious development to now produce over 200 tonnes of macadamia nuts from over 20,000 trees each year.



More recently, Maravista converted some of the spare land to small-scale farming to grow food for the restaurants. Three years in, they are continuing to work with their farmers and chefs to establish an efficient and flexible system to supply their restaurants with high quality, organic produce grown specifically for seasonal menus. It has taken periods of trial and error for the farm, moving between producing a small number of consistent crops and attempting to meet complex needs of the chefs' creative and exotic culinary imagination. An efficient balance is a work in progress for Maravista, but the project is taking shape with each year the farm matures. The flexible and complementary relationship between chef and farmer means very little is wasted, with excess produce becoming the weekly special or pickled for alternative uses.

Maravista farm produces a variety of vegetables including zucchinis, pumpkins, broccolini, and spinach, a range of microgreens, and flowers for garnish such as borage. Using only organic processes and products, the farm utilises organic waste and kitchen scraps from the restaurants to build nutrient rich soil on the farm and close the food/waste loop. They are also looking to produce citrus on the farm, with 60 fruiting trees still partially in development.

More information and photos can be found at maravistafarm.com

Case study: Suncoast Fresh - Local produce distributors

Suncoast Fresh are a local product distribution business operating for over 18 years, originating from the Sunshine Coast and now servicing through distribution centres in Brisbane and more recently Byron Bay. Suncoast prioritise high quality produce for the consumer, restaurants, hotels, and anyone who needs

fresh fruit and vegetables where they are. Epitomising the farm to table philosophy, building direct contact and strong relationships with Sunshine Coast farms promotes efficient and sustainable growing practices. They pride themselves on being in tune with seasonal growing processes, as well as industry food trends. Suncoast also provide an extensive seasonal guide on their website, with information on what produce is available through each month. Suncoast Fresh provides a distribution option for producers of small-scale and niche food products in the Noosa region.



Interested producers can contact Suncoast Fresh at suncoastfresh.com.au

Case study: Spare Harvest - Online community and marketplace connecting excess with need

Spare Harvest is an online marketplace for food and garden goods and services. The database of listings does not facilitate the transaction itself, rather it encourages people to connect with those nearby for efficient food and garden resource usage. Started by the Sunshine Coast's Helen Andrew, the idea started with excess fruit from backyard trees and has grown into an international community. Users can share, swap, and sell goods via a website and app. There is also a desire to see



community building happen in this process where sharing, swapping, and trading bring people together. Spare Harvest works to better use and distribute resources to reduce waste and maximise efficiency of consumption. It is simple to sign up and browse the marketplace and list your own items. It provides an opportunity for entry-level marketplace activity, perhaps for community members growing produce but not yet set up for any official commercial operation.

All community members can register and begin trading for free at spareharvest.com.

Case study: Food and Agribusiness Network (FAN)

The Food and Agribusiness Network (FAN) is a member-based not-for-profit that exists to help the industry connect, collaborate, and grow and spans from Moreton Bay, up the Sunshine Coast to Noosa and out to Gympie. It was recently awarded the best small business social enterprise at the Sunshine Coast Small Business Awards.



FAN has a vision to double the region's food and agriculture industry by 2030. They aim to do this by actively facilitating collaboration, promoting innovation, and promoting trade in South East Queensland and across the globe. FAN develops strategic partnerships to further the growth and success of their network, and hosts events that connect businesses, distributors, exporters, and consumers across the entire food chain.

One such event is FAN's annual Meet the Makers event which features a large variety of producers in the region, each showcasing their products and telling the story of their work. This year, over 50 FAN members will feature at the event held at the Big Pineapple.

FAN also offers business development workshops and a six month mentoring program which links FAN members at different stages of business development. It also features an intensive three month food start up accelerator for high-potential businesses, funded by Advance Queensland.

Since its inception in late 2015, FAN has grown to 260 members, supported 13 members to exhibit at the Fine Food trade show, and facilitated new partnerships for 53 percent of their members.

FAN is a powerful advocate for the development of food and agriculture in the region, hoping to raise the profile of the Sunshine Coast to the highest reputation of quality, innovation, and sustainability.

To connect with FAN, interested growers can contact the network via foodagribusiness.org.au.

Case study: Food connect

The Food Connect foundation works to encourage bottom-up economies by facilitating connections between ethical regional food businesses, co-operatives, bulk buyers groups and

ecological farmers through the [Food Connect](#) network of local farmers and artisan foodmakers.

Food Connect has recently transitioned its operations to a multi-farmer/processor/consumer aggregation and distribution enterprise. Their main activities include retail and wholesale operations with processing facilities that are used by five other ethical food businesses. Currently 89 organic and ecological farmers that are too small to compete in wholesale and too big to operate exclusively in direct to consumer channels work directly with Food Connect. The Hub improves farmers' economic advantage by strengthening their capacity to supply local markets, thereby r-building resilient regional food systems.



Additional investment in the model is planned to take advantage of the burgeoning Social Procurement policies by institutional providers (hospitals, child care, government agencies) and bulk buying clubs. The long-term plans include scaling to include twenty on-site processors collaborating with farmers on marketing, waste minimisation, logistics, ecological sustainability, and local economics.

Food Connect successfully raised over \$2.1million in a crowdfunding campaign to create the local food hub, with over 500 investors engaging in the project. This allowed them to purchase their current industrial premises.

The Food Hub collaboration will be governed by the Food Connect Foundation through a multi-stakeholder board from farmers to consumers who have oversight on the direction and use of the intellectual property the collaboration develops.

Other networks and distributors

Cooran Food Collective

Connects growers in the region and hosts events celebrating local foods. The collective can be contacted with the following details:

(e) cooranfoodcollective@gmail.com

(m) 0472710831

Farmtucker

Farmtucker is an online directory of farms that sell produce direct from their property. It aims to increase access for consumers and restaurants, promote healthy eating, and educate people about the origins of food. This will allow producers 'to commoditise and humanise their produce'.

The Farmtucker website profiles farms nationwide, and features details about the farm, contact information and product information and seasonality. Farmtucker also promotes its farmgate members regular on social media.

The directory is still under development and encourages farms to register their details through the website form.

Local growers can register at farmtucker.com.au/contact.

The Produce Wholesaler

The regions longest running fruit and vegetable wholesaler, The Produce Wholesaler works with growers local and further afield to bring the best quality to restaurants and homes, through their overnight all-week delivery and 'holiday boxes'.

<https://www.theproducewholesaler.com.au/>