



MAIN: Glasshouse Mountain's farmer Karen Martin; INSET: Elizabeth and Tony Craig-Holmes host People, Plates and Place to feature local produce and farmers. PHOTO: EMMA NAYLER

FEASTING WITH FARMERS

LOCAL BUSINESS HELPING DROUGHT-STRICKEN FARMERS BY SETTING UP A UNIQUE RESTAURANT ON THEIR PROPERTIES TO SEAT 190 PEOPLE

It's no secret that Aussie farmers are having a tough time with drought diminishing livestock, milk selling for just over \$1 a litre and, of course, the recent strawberry catastrophe.

The survival of our farmers is vital for our own livelihoods, so many of us are lending a helping hand through donation drives or pushing for new government funding incentives.

But one local business has found a way to support Sunshine Coast farmers in way that's fun and fresh!

People Plates and Places takes local produce direct from the farm and delivers it straight to the plate. To showcase our farmers and their incredible produce.

For each event Elizabeth Craig-Holmes and her husband Tony Holmes pack up their compact "trailer" kitchen and take to the road to find local growers in need of a lift.

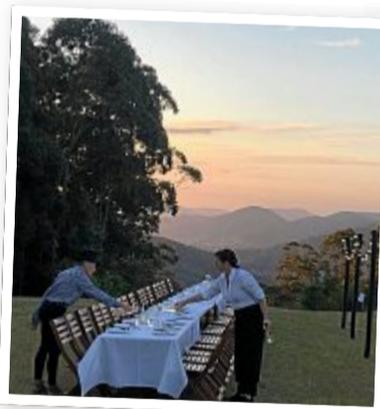
On these properties, the couple set up their unique restaurant without walls, that includes an outdoor long table where they treat guests of up to 190 people, to a five-course meal in a setting unlike any other.

Think lychee orchids, open paddocks or the rolling hills of Montville.

Each event promises a one off menu created by an experienced chef, using only produce from that specific farm (or nearby ones if necessary). Then a local winemaker or "wine expert" steps in to design a drinks menu that perfectly compliments each course. Having no background in hospitality Elizabeth leaves the technical stuff to her skilful team.

"Look if I was the one cooking you wouldn't be coming," she joked.

"Sean Heyward has been with us since the beginning and he is just the most magnificent chef. He comes up with great menus and he



WORDS: ANNIE CAUGHEY

is extraordinarily patient, he works very well with what he is given, in terms of equipment. The fact the he has to work in a 2x6x3 canopy pop-up kitchen and still provides those meals for that many people, it's extraordinary."

However, while they may not cook, Elizabeth and Tony are the fire behind this project. As ex-teachers in search of a new path, they were first inspired by their infatuated love for sharing "good food with good people." They are passionate about supporting local farmers and wanted to use their education skills to show people, eating fresh and eating local doesn't always mean a plate of bland chicken and boring boiled vegetables.

"All of my facilitation career has been based on learning through experience. So all of my lessons are set up like that," Elizabeth said.

"By taking someone out to a paddock we are doing exactly that. They already know what they like, but they haven't experienced what the farmer goes through, they haven't seen how they can use that food from his or her property to create a very beautiful meal."

The outdoor setting of "the restaurant without walls" encompasses peace and serenity away from the usual chatter of a busy venue. This indifference creates an open and calm atmosphere, which in turn encourages conversation and brings people together. Elizabeth explains that all the guests share a communal meal, which usually involves one person volunteering as the server, which creates an open group dynamic.

"It starts with someone saying, 'would you like some of this,' which then leads to a question like, 'so what do you do,' and this

opens up the conversation for that entire section of the table," Elizabeth said.

"Usually people come in pairs but they spend the night in groups."

At the last People Plates and Places event held at a property in Montville, guests listened to a heart felt presentation from a nearby farmer Brodie O'Flynn who is just starting out in the industry.

This is a common thread at the events, usually hosts will share wonderful stories about their properties and journeys including their struggles as well as triumphs. This creates a special connection

between the growers and the consumers, that is otherwise lost in the production chain of typical restaurants.

Aside from this very real human connection, many farmers also benefit from the abundance of guests promoting their estates on social media, increasing their exposure and prominence throughout the region. This has helped previous hosts gain new business, supplier contacts and most importantly, provided them with face-to-face interaction with their local community.

The next People Plates and Places event will be held beneath a lychee orchid at a beautiful property in the Glass House Mountains.

The lush orchards owned by Karen and Rob Martin showcase rainbow hues, planted in perfect rows featuring the juiciest lychees, dark-red dragon fruit and the couples world-first PinksBlush variety of custard apples (which you can most definitely expect to see on the menu).

Tickets to this event can be found: at peopleplatesplaces.com.au/