

# Growing an exciting future for native grains and community



## Case Study garinga djimbayang

Black Duck Foods is committed to preserving and promoting First Nations agriculture and food systems.

Chris Harris is a Ngiyampaa man who grew up on Wiradjuri country in Griffith. For the past 13 years he's lived on Yuin Country and for 5 years has worked as Farm Manager at Black Duck Foods, based at Yumburra Farm near Mallacoota.

Chris came to Black Duck Foods by coincidence as much as destiny. Working as a tradie, he came to Yumburra Farm to do some plastering for Elder, Uncle Bruce Pascoe. After yarning about bush tucker, Chris shared his stories about spending time on Country with his aunties and uncles, learning about traditional foods and caring for Country. Recognising his passion, burgeoning knowledge and love of working on Country, Uncle Bruce said to Chris, "We've got a job here for you."

### Learning about food systems

As Farm Manager, Chris draws on skills from past roles while being hands-on across every part of the agricultural process: from growing and harvesting to processing and marketing a variety of bushfoods, including flours and grains from kangaroo, spear, and other native grasses, seeds from acacias, and tubers from murnong (yam daisy), lilies, and orchids.

Black Duck Foods is named for the black ducks which are a totem in Yuin Country. The pre-colonial food systems and land stewardship practices used on Yumburra Farm were explored in the book *Dark Emu*, written by Uncle Bruce. Together with Uncle Noel Butler, Uncle Bruce is the co-founder of Black Duck Foods and an important mentor for Chris on the farm.

### The benefits of bush foods and native grasses

There is much to be learnt from Traditional Knowledge that First Nations peoples have passed down and evolved over millennia. Chris says that native grasses and other bush food plants have no need for chemical fertilisers or extra water.

*"Our old people worked on Country, with Country, not against Country. And that's how we work today."*

Modern techniques now assist in processing grains and seeds. Chris is proud that Indigenous cultural practices such as cool burns and sustainability-centred approaches to land cultivation remain central to their business.

All of Black Duck Foods' crops are seasonal. Chris explains *"our most important tool is understanding Country. When you're working on Country, you get a good feel and a connection."*



*"You need to watch what's flowering and keep an eye on the seeds, so you know when it's time to harvest. And all the flowers have different meanings as well. That could mean that the oysters are spawning, so you don't eat the oysters at that time. Everything around us is all connected."*

### **A rewarding career in the agriculture sector**

Chris wants to see more community get involved in agriculture and says that a passion to learn and work hard can open pathways to a great career, as it has for him. *"I wasn't a farmer before, but all the stuff that I've learned and done in my life has led me and given me the experience to do the job I'm doing today."*

*"I think the vision would be to have all mob connecting with the grains they are growing on their Country; being connected to Country with hands in the soil. At Black Duck Foods, we're not the only ones, or the biggest, but we're a great model for how mob can get involved."*

### **Kangaroo grass – ancient grain and superfood**

Chris sees kangaroo grass as one of the most important bushfoods harvested on Yumburra Farm and has come to really understand the plant's lifecycle. When the seeds have been pollinated and they're ready to go, there's only a short window for the harvest as the seeds ripen. As soon as the days get hotter, the seed can jump from the floret and be lost on the ground.

After seeds are harvested, they are dried for a few days until they are ready to be processed or milled into flour and packed on site. Products are sold locally and to distant markets as the demand for traditional bushfoods continues to grow. Mob, chefs and home cooks are looking to add a unique taste of Australia to their recipes.

Like most bush foods, the seeds and grains harvested by Black Duck Foods are protein and nutrient rich. Some native grains they collect have 28% protein, compared to around 12% in processed wheat flour. Chris says they make an excellent damper, tasty Johnny cakes and he even makes pasta from wallaby grass flour to use in kangaroo lasagna.

### **Growing sustainable futures by learning from the past**

Black Duck Foods was created with a vision of helping to guide Australian agriculture toward a more sustainable future by cultivating and promoting traditional bush foods.

*"We're not just preserving and sharing our ancient agricultural and culinary heritage, we're also creating economic opportunities and promoting self-determination through agriculture."*

Chris is keen to share his knowledge and help inspire the next generation of First Nations farmers and growers to learn about their history and how caring for Country benefits the food system.



**"The old people harvested, propagated, nurtured and processed a wide range of foods. We are working with the grains and tubers that held our soil together and promoted its fertility."**

For more about Black Duck Foods, visit [blackduckfoods.com.au](https://blackduckfoods.com.au)

For more about First Nations peoples' connection to agriculture, visit [agriculture.vic.gov.au/garinga-djimbayang](https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/garinga-djimbayang)

