

## An eye to the future with premium olives

A long-term plan to make her business self-sufficient by 2020/21 has led premium table olive and saffron producer, Gamila MacRury, to adopt a stepped approach to market outlets for each product.

Her "bread and butter" earner is table olives, which she currently sells into farmers' markets, mainly in Melbourne. However, her plan is to gradually connect with boutique retail outlets, then approach food service outlets as her yields grow.

Gamila's saffron crop is requiring a different approach. With Australian saffron prices approaching those for imported saffron due to the current market, she is focusing on market education around the true culinary value of saffron and how to use it to best effect. Her aim is to embed her saffron in the premium product market where it can command a high price.



Gamila bought her 5.5-hectare property near Beechworth almost nine years ago with no specific business opportunity in mind. Her plan was to fit the enterprise to the climate and topography of the land.



She quickly settled on planting table olives and saffron, with a focus on establishing direct consumer retail and approaching customised food businesses to sell her produce.

"The property and climate suited both crops," she said. "I took the opportunity to move into the table olive space, growing several types. I chose table olives rather than olives for oils because I felt that market was saturated."

Gamila planted a 600-tree grove with a mix of 11 varieties, knowing it would take about seven years for the trees to start bearing a harvestable quantity of fruit and 10 years to reach a full crop of 10kg-15kg/tree. All olives are processed on site.

Now at year nine, Gamila is still ramping up production. In 2017 she picked 700kg but was hoping for a two tonne (T) crop to allow her to reduce her off-farm work. This year saw her almost reach that goal, picking 1.9T, and she anticipates reaching 2.5 T in 2019.

Gamila has graduated her marketing strategy to align with this gradual increase in tonnage harvested. She is just now releasing her 2017 stock, deliberately targeting only farmers' markets – nearly all in Melbourne.

"I have a couple of products in the Richmond Hill Larder and my olives are now stocked in one of Melbourne's Arts Centre bars, after the centre contacted me when I won medals for my olives at the Australian Food Awards," she said. "For the time being I'll still be cautious about retail or food service – that's because I don't want to overpromise and undersupply."

Gamila thinks her olives will be the staple crop for her long-term, with saffron providing the "cream" on top. This is because she can estimate her cash flow 18 months in advance with the olives, while the saffron harvest is unpredictable even up to the last week before picking.

*"I'll start local, with long-term plans for 50% to go into in-venue consumption and catering companies, 25% into retail gourmet and boutique shops and 25% direct to consumers either through e-commerce or direct through farmers' markets."*