

Innovation in Native Ingredients

Case Study

garinga djimbayang

Sharon Brindley, founder of Jala Jala Treats, supports First Nations food growers and is scaling up the use of native ingredients in chocolate.

Entrepreneur and Jala Jala Treats owner, Sharon Brindley is a proud Yamatgi, Noongar woman, and a beacon of ideas and innovation. A cafe owner turned chocolate manufacturer, Sharon now markets her products under the brands Jala Jala Treats and Only Mine.

Jala Jala Treats products are made at the Only Mine chocolate factory, which is located on Bunurong Country, in Cranbourne West, Victoria.

By incorporating a variety of native ingredients into her chocolate products, Sharon has grown Jala Jala Treats from a small enterprise to a multi-product business, paving the way for First Nations owned food manufacturing at scale.

Reclaiming voice, identity and ownership in the native ingredients space is fundamental to Sharon's business and journey.

Unconventional career path

Sharon is frank that her career pathway was unconventional, and that she *"did everything backwards"*. After grieving the loss of her mother at the young age of eleven, and a rocky start as a teen, Sharon says *"I didn't understand who I was, or anything to do with what my purpose was"*.

It wasn't until later in life, after marriage and starting a little takeaway business called 'Shazza's', that her confidence started to build. After reconnecting with family and some *"special people"* including Aunty Raylene Brown and Aunty Pat Torres, Sharon began to see an exciting path unfold.

Leading the way with production in bushfoods

With no blueprint of her own in starting a manufacturing business, Sharon says she wanted to share native flavours through food sourced from First Nations growers. *"I thought it would be easy, and it sort of wasn't"* she recalls.

There were challenges sourcing native ingredients from within community at scale, and a lot of the small growers she wanted to align with, uplift, and purchase from, faced challenges of their own with infrastructure and accreditation.

These initial hurdles and her desire to build the Blak agricultural supply chain from the ground up led Sharon to join the First Nations, Bush Foods and Botanical Alliance Australia (FNBBAA).





Eating our history

Sharon incorporates native ingredients like finger lime, Davidson plum, wattleseed and lemon myrtle into the chocolates she manufactures under the Jala Jala Treats brand. It is a way for Sharon, *"to use my totem, our language and my nana's tongue, which was never allowed to be used back then"*. Reclaiming voice, identity and ownership in the native ingredients space is fundamental to Sharon's business and journey.

"I think it's crucial in the way that children of all different cultures that live in Australia, have a better understanding of native ingredients, and then learn the stories of those plants in school, so they know what they can eat."

"We love taking the grandkids out and teaching them all those things, because then it is grounding them to where they are, because each area is different."

Nurturing new futures

Sharon continues to shine a light on the benefits of the circular economy. Through her vast experience in the native foods sector, she helps to grow confidence and know-how within community, so the whole ecosystem of First Nations growers and buyers can flourish.

"The best steps I would say to get into the sector would be, do what we're all good at, and that is yarning; like talking, coming together with your community, starting collaborations... that unconventional way of coming in, thinking outside the box, and creating products."

First Nations Bushfoods and Botanicals Alliance Australia

FNBBAA, developed by a few Aunties *"was a way of having a national, peak body that was Indigenous owned, run and led while providing safe space for community to be able to come and have their products or native ingredients recognised, and share their stories"*.

With a vision of a strong First Nations' food supply chain and circular economy, Sharon soon became the Victorian Director of FNBBAA. Sharon says by purchasing from and supporting mob, she wants to see mob succeeding *"as a collective and really growing each other, throughout the whole of Australia."*

Through FNBBAA and later as a consultant and mentor, Sharon was able to stand up for people and use her voice to advocate for change in the agricultural and specifically bush foods sector. *"I'm just determined now to talk and engage as much as possible... to really shout out. It's now time that we're all heard in that space."* Her talks and energy gained traction, alongside the chocolate. *"The path was there; and the leaves all started moving, it just opened and I just walked it."*

"It all comes back to agriculture, food, sustainability, with a modern twist."

For more about Jala Jala Treats, visit jalajalatreats.com.au

For more about First Nations peoples' connection to agriculture, visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/garinga-djimbayang

