



FOOD – necessary and normally nice, and not too many things in life can match that. We've never had such a variety and abundance to choose from, and as the saying goes "variety is the spice of life".

Refrigeration, high-tech packaging and simple long distance transport systems mean our food can come from pretty well anywhere in the world. Climate Change however, has "drawn the crabs" on the energy and resources used in transporting food all over the planet, and a few years back the "Food Miles" issue gained a solid base in Europe.

The fact that most "fresh" produce on our supermarket shelves has been at least to Brisbane and back, even if it was grown as far north as Cooktown, demonstrates what the fuss is all about. Great for transport companies and fuel suppliers!

The NSDA (Network for Sustained and Diversified Agriculture) has roped in quite a few social and environmental issues with the "FARMGATE MARKETS" held every Saturday at the PIER in Cairns. At the opening of the markets in April, Sarah Rizvi (NSDA Secretary) said "We hope this event will promote consumer consciousness about the social, environmental, nutritional and community benefits of supporting local food networks, and provide an outlet for discerning Cairns customers who seek to support fresh local produce".

We attended the market for the first month (until our rambutan and breadfruit season ended) and found it to be well worthwhile for various reasons. The NSDA (with funding from support from Blueprint for the Bush) have done a great job planning and running the markets. Stallholders can only sell produce from the "local" area with the extremities of Cooktown, Chillagoe and Cardwell.

All stallholders' presentations of locally grown or manufactured foods are labelled with the area produced, distance travelled to market, and in most cases nutritional values and production methods.



As growers we found the face to face interaction with market shoppers enlightening with respect to their knowledge, taste preferences and buying habits regarding tropical exotic fruits. As we'd expect a big percentage of shoppers look for best value for money, some are hungry for new tastes, and an impressive number were there with a strong conviction to support their environmental, ethical and health values.

The FARMGATE growers market should become the best in Australia as the local region it covers, from ultratropical coastal to temperate tableland growing environments, has the potential to produce almost all of the world's food lines at some stage of the season, which could not be done anywhere else on our continent.

Local markets give producers a perfect opportunity for promotion and market research of their lines and things like the Amazon Custard Apple (*rollinia deliciosa*) pictured, which are difficult to freight long distances, are therefore perfect for local trade. While the southern cities will still be the destination of most of our fruit

production, local markets like those at Farmgate and Mission Beach will clearly follow the trends and grow in popularity as THE place to get the freshest seasonal foods as well as a "must do" for visitors to our area.

The more people supporting the local markets, the better they'll get, and as individuals the "power of our purse" is stronger than our political vote in most situations.

The likes of King Island and Margaret River have benefited greatly from their reputations for good tucker, however there are plenty of indications the amazing diversity of colours and tastes of the Tropical North foodies' paradise is a sleeping giant starting to stir.

**Buy fresh – Buy local!**

Peter Salleras

## Dad and Chicks

It is wonderful to report that the Dad and chicks featured in the last Bulletin survived the dog attack. They have not been seen in the vicinity of the incident since but have been reported actually near where the dog lives at Bingil Bay. It is part of the habitat connectivity, mainly along the gullies between residential development and the banana farm.

The birds keep well down into the gullies now and although the dog is responsibly confined in a fenced yard it does, as do many other dogs in the area, bark when aware of their presence.

As development encroaches more into cassowary habitat even a confined dog can intimidate cassowaries, denying them free

movement and access to important food resources.

If you own a dog on a property which has a boundary onto natural vegetation, please consider placing your pets fenced area away from the boundary or where your dog is less likely to be aware of wildlife movements.



By being aware of the impact each of us has on our immediate environment, we can make a difference in coexisting with the special native flora and fauna of our area.