



RURALINSIGHT

NZ'S #1 RURAL REAL ESTATE BRAND

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FARM TO PLATE INNOVATION ADDS VALUE

Throughout provincial New Zealand there is a food revolution taking place boosting employment opportunities, adding value to raw products and growing this country's reputation as a South Pacific food bowl.

Growth in the food market is coming from consumers seeking out convenience but without sacrificing their meal's quality, nutritive value or sustainability alongside the "ready to eat" convenience.

Food marketing consultant Belinda Bonnor of Zest Marketing has several food-based clients in the lower North Island that typify how small operators can punch well above their weight when it comes to producing a world class food product from raw produce.

One of those companies is Kiwi Quinoa, produced by Dan and Jacqui Cottrell from their property backing onto the Kaweka ranges east of Taihape.

They are a couple blazing a pioneering trail in growing the ancient grain in New Zealand, taking it from paddock to plate with some innovative marketing methods.

The traditional grain like food became a hit initially with the hipster food set, but is increasingly being recognised widely for its excellent nutritional profile and ability to be used across a wide range of meal applications.

The couple recently received national recognition for their unique crop winning the New Zealand Food Safety Primary Sector product award in this year's national Food Awards.

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As more consumers opt for a more “flexitarian” type diet that may include vegetarian meals, quinoa can provide a high protein, high fibre, gluten free meal component and is one of only a few plant foods that is a complete protein offering.

Jacqui and Dan were inspired to try growing quinoa on the family farm after they saw it in Peru while back-packing, growing in country Dan considered very similar to the farm back in New Zealand.

“Dan spent a good year researching all the types of quinoa, eventually coming up with four varieties to trial, of which one stood out. Our variety does not have a bitter saponin coating which means our quinoa requires less processing than other commercial types so it can be classed as ‘wholegrain’,” says Jacqui. Quinoa is also a crop that can be grown in the right conditions without any need for pesticides or fungicides.

The couple have not stopped at growing the crop, taking a “paddock to plate” approach creating their brand Kiwi Quinoa and marketing it through gourmet food shops and more recently supermarkets.

They work hard promoting Kiwi Quinoa in-store and locally and are in the midst of rolling out their new branding and packaging.

On farm Jacqui says the crop has proven ideally suited to the property’s higher, drier altitude and climate, delivering excellent protein levels and good yields.

They continue to experiment with cultivation and establishment, aiming to grow a crop that minimises soil damage and has no need for pesticides and fungicides.

“It is still quite early days because quinoa is such a new crop for New Zealand, but we are really excited at how it has performed for

us so far. It has integrated well with our farming system, and we have been getting a lot of interest from the neighbours in what we are doing.”

Meantime further south an established salad company is taking humble vegetables and turning them into innovative, value added and convenient food options.

Marton based company Speirs Foods has moved to add to the bulk salads it provides to supermarkets with a range of convenience products branded The Whole Mix. Their vegetable noodles, the first in New Zealand earned them the Supreme Award at the NZ Food Awards last year.

Since then they have launched a new range of bagged coleslaw and stir-fry kits with the latest, Mexican coleslaw just hitting the supermarket shelves to spice up the market. The Whole Mix range also provides Grab & Go Salads and Snack pot salads for healthy living on the go.

“Traditionally we’ve sourced vegetables for our bulk and convenience salads from suppliers but now we’re growing more and more of our own produce just down the road from our factory and creating delicious salads right here in Marton to make people’s lives healthier and easier”, says Belinda Bonnor.

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Bayleys National Director Rural, Duncan Ross says the talented and innovative approach taken by farmers to move their crop or protein product along the distribution chain to consumers fits well in a market where consumers are increasingly wanting to know where their food is from.

“The ability to go and do this highlights there is more than just the conventional “price taker” model for farmers today – it may be riskier in some respects, but it gives farmers a direct link to their market, and constant feedback on how their product is performing.”

