



Ducking in at Windsor for huge market share

SIXTY thousand ducks a week are packed out the door of Pepe's Ducks at Windsor, an employer of 100 people.

Asian consumers eat 90 per cent of the 40,000 of Pepe's ducks sold in NSW but the market is shifting.

While they enjoy the flavour-some fat content of the company's English Cherry Valley ducks, Grimaud, a French breed, has the genetics to produce very low fat and high meat favoured by an increasing number of non-Asian consumers.

Starting with 22 ducks at Eastern Creek in 1972, Pepe Bonaccordo built an enterprise that took him to France last year to invest \$2M in 3000 fertile Grimaud eggs, from which emerged 1000 ducklings.

By the end of the year, Grimauds will make up half Pepe's breeding and meat bird flocks, with plans to import more eggs and the expectation that, ultimately, non-Asian consumers around the country will buy 80pc of the total Grimaud birds.

RON AGGS
Camden

This is not to say Asian consumers are going off their duck. It's about overall market expansion.

"If progress is good, once we've built the flock to be half Grimauds, we'll evaluate whether to go further," said Pepe's general manager, John Houston.

According to Mr Houston, low cholesterol fat and meat is one factor making flavoursome duck increasingly popular; growing and supply chain conditions are great in the Sydney Basin.

"Grimauds are not as rough and tumble as some breeds and need a bit more gentle care but when they get it they do perform," said Mr Houston.

Good farm husbandry, biosecurity and cleanliness are critical and farm staff learn the mannerisms of the birds and how to treat stress.

The ducks eat a formulation of wheat with no sorghum plus addi-

tives – vitamins and minerals – a closely kept secret.

Grimauds reach breeding maturity in 24 weeks and lay up to 240 eggs (just for breeding) in 46 weeks in their laying period.

A new Grimaud hatchery is also operating. It started slowly and will have the capacity build up to 100,000 day old ducklings a week.

The company regards the Hawkesbury as the perfect location to reach its market.

"It is the ideal station for processing and at all farm locations we are able to meet effluent management and other environmental requirements," said Mr Houston.

"Today's road system links us closely to all our farms and we wouldn't want to be anywhere else for distribution into western Sydney, CBD and North Shore."

Pepe's owns farms around the western rim of the Sydney Basin from Arcadia in the north to Cobbity in the south.

■ **Contact John Houston,**
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Pepe's Ducks general manager, John Houston, and operations manager, Mario Bonaccordo, at one of the company's breeding farms west of Windsor.

Information day for cut flower growers

MANAGING pests and diseases is the number one commercial priority for cut flower growers.

This will be the focus of a free information day for growers at the Dural Country Club on July 30.

Bettina Gollnow, NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) floriculture development officer and Alan Merriman of Organic Fertilisers are organising the event.

NSW DPI plant pathologist Len Tesoriero will be one of three guest speakers. A researcher and diagnostic pathologist, he will discuss common diseases of flower crops.

Mr Tesoriero will introduce the major diseases and explain how growers can best manage them. With prevention being better than cure, he will highlight hygiene practices growers can use to minimise disease outbreaks.

Western flower thrips spell double trouble for growers, because of their direct damage to crops, combined with their ability to transfer tomato spotted wilt virus to crops.

Stacey Azzopardi, NSW DPI vegetable IPM project officer will explain how growers can manage both problems.

Greg Neighbour, technical director of Scotts – Asia Pacific will highlight recent developments in chemical control and introduce new products on the market.

All the speakers will answer questions from the audience.

A trade display of products and services available to commercial growers will also be held. Companies wishing to take part should contact the organisers.

■ **Contact Bettina Gollnow,**
4640 4637, or **Alan Merriman,**
4773 4291 or 0408 267 728.

The family staying on its turf

WORD of mouth advertising is sufficient to keep the long, green tongues of turf rolling off the Nepean floodplain property of Charlie and Pauline Saliba at Wilberforce.

"It's rich, fertile land and it's unsuitable for housing because it's flood prone," says Charlie Saliba.

"This is one part of Sydney where farmers don't feel they are about to be built out by residential development."

The Salibas own two farming ventures – the Orange Spot, a sizable citrus grove listed on the Hawkesbury Harvest's Farm Gate Trail, which they bought as a going concern in 2000 and Saliba Turf and Landscape Services.

Their turf business is one of a dozen operations in the Sydney Basin that supplies "maxi" or "jumbo" rolls – commercial quantities of turf for projects like golf courses and ovals. They can have up to 10 contracts going at once which involve initial supply then follow up service.

They also cut smaller rolls too, to sell direct to domestic landscapers and householders.

Of Maltese background, Charlie's father bought the land



RIGHT AND ABOVE: At Wilberforce, Charlie and Pauline Saliba and Garry Hall check turf "maxi" or "jumbo" rolls on a roll cutter behind a tractor. Finished rolls are removed by a forklift.

in 1961 and the family farmed vegetables. Charlie bought and farmed additional land and saw the opportunity in 1990 that turf presented.

The company is one of at least 50 operators in the region who supply domestic landscaping and commercial quantities of turf.

Besides Charlie and Pauline, the company employs five additional staff and the business is coping with the rise of more competitors and higher fertiliser, fuel and water costs.

The Salibas' land at Wilber-



force can't deliver enough turf to meet demand so they also take their equipment to cut on properties of two subcontracted growers.

By supplying commercial quantities they keep labour costs low.

While cutting a paddock full of jumbos and cutting smaller rolls requires a comparable number of hands, it is more labour efficient to lay larger rolls.

Environmental considerations may soon include building water retention dams but Charlie says the turf uses almost all the irrigation supplied to it.

"We would also certainly use grey recycled water if it became available," he says.

Two sons have the option to carry on the family business.

■ **Contact Charlie or Pauline Saliba** 4579 6364
sales@turf4u.com.au

Wok do you call an Asian vegetable?

IF ADDING chi gua to a stir-fry sounds more appealing to you than adding hairy melon, you might want to offer an opinion on other Asian vegetable names.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) wants people to have their say on the names of Asian vegetables by taking part in a survey that will help develop standardised names.

"Confusion over names can make consumers reluctant to try unfamiliar products," said research horticulturist, Dr Jenny Ekman.

It can also blur the issues of safe chemical use and appropriate residue levels.

Dr Ekman said everybody speaking the same language of standardised names for commonly available Asian vegeta-



Dr Jenny Ekman, with a chi gua or hairy melon dish, wants to find out which Asian vegetable names consumers prefer.

bles would benefit consumers and all sectors of the industry. "Often vegetables grown in a

number of Asian countries with different languages translate into different names in Australia," she said.

"This creates difficulties for growers, wholesalers, retailers, chefs, consumers and even regulators.

"Standardised names will help regulators clarify what chemicals can be safely used on each vegetable and ensure appropriate chemical residue levels are set."

Dr Ekman said there were marketing advantages in having standardised names for Asian vegetables.

"Buyers may not know if buk choy is the same as pak choy, or if what they really want is a Chinese cabbage.

"And having the right name for

a vegetable may help expand the market."

The Asian vegetable survey is part of a three year project to improve market access for Asian vegetables, being undertaken by NSW DPI with funding from Horticulture Australia and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

The survey is posted on the internet at www.agric.nsw.gov.au/reader/asian-veg-survey. Copies are also available from Dr Ekman.

The results of the survey and a national system of names will be launched later this year, in time for the main spring-summer growing season.

■ **Contact Dr Jenny Ekman,**
(02) 4348 1942

– TOM BRAZ

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