

# ARE YOU ON TOP OF #foodtrends?



#### INFLUENCING CHEFS

(Above, then clockwise) Celebrity chef, Heston Blumenthal, is a shareholder of Aquna Sustainable Murray Cod, collaborating with Aquna on menu and product development to extend the food brand's reach in local and global markets; Aquna Murray Cod on ice, ready to be shipped to Japan; Aquna grows its premium Murray Cod in open ponds or dams on the Murray-Darling Basin river system.



Just like the seasons, food trends come and go. But some such as the ‘paddock to plate’ can end up driving the entire food industry in new directions for decades. Just how closely do farmers need to follow food trends in order to stay in business?

Words **LISA SMYTH**

**F**or the millions of Australians who religiously watched *MasterChef* during months of lockdown this year there was one clear takeaway – the Japanese hibachi grill was the kitchen gadget every home cook needs to have in 2020. One online retailer reported a whopping 1600 per cent increase in sales for their version, and recipes for how to cook meat and fish on the countertop ‘fire bowls’ were circulating around the internet with dizzying speed.

Whether the hibachi grill trend will stand the test of time remains to be seen. But for farmers around the country right now, especially those with a direct-to-consumer arm to their business, sharing a hibachi grill recipe or two is a guaranteed way to pique people’s interest in your product.

But, are Australian food trends really that fickle? And won’t people always want great beef or juicy fresh pears no matter what the latest trend is? We asked four NSW businesses along the supply chain about the importance of food trends.



*Lynsey Reilly, Corporate Affairs Manager*  
**AQUNA, SUSTAINABLE MURRAY COD, GRIFFITH NSW**

Our domestic retail sales have really increased since COVID-19 started. We believe this is because people are staying home and wanting to try and replicate the restaurant experience. Traffic to the recipes on our website has spiked, especially the ones we have created with celebrity chef Heston Blumenthal, and we are being sent all sorts of wonderful images of creations that people have been making at home.

We are seeing many chefs innovate with our Murray Cod and utilise it in really non-traditional ways, which is leading to demand for different sizing, for sashimi for instance. Murray Cod has never really been used as sashimi before, however this has started to evolve as a trend in the last 12 months. We are even exporting our Murray Cod to Japan, specifically for this purpose, and have also seen this trend starting here in Australia.



*Ben Lipschitz, Managing Director*

**FOODBYUS, WHOLESALE GROCERIES SUPPLIER, SYDNEY, NSW**

Consumers are definitely in the driving seat when it comes to food trends. Farmers, like restaurants, need to be responsive and savvy about food trends where they can. Some trends are fleeting – remember unicorn and charcoal food that came and went in 2019? These aren't the types of trends that are widely accessible to farmers. Then there are the movements – veganism, flexitarianism – that gain popularity year after year. It's these movements that open opportunities for farmers.

Source and supply chain is a bigger topic than ever. There's an increasing demand for local supply, with consumers wanting fresh 'farm to fork' food, with the feel-good factor that they're also helping local suppliers whilst also being sustainably responsible.



*Nicole Townsend, Marketing Manager*

**MONTAGUE APPLES, BATLOW, NSW**

It takes 10 plus years to test and grow a new apple variety, so we travel the world to find the best tasting, natural, fruit varieties to test back home for a number of years before bringing them to market. We do taste-testing in consumer research groups to arrive at planting new generation apples such as Jazz and Eve.

Consumers are increasingly interested in knowing where their fresh produce and food comes from, which is one of the reasons why we have created a space in our new facility that enables consumers to see our supply chain process, from orchard through to packing. Consumers certainly want to know more and more about provenance and the resilience of the supply chain, as well as the route to market, and farmers need to find ways to share that with their customers.

## Plant-based diets remain popular

While trends like keto and low-carb have reduced in popularity during 2020, a Food Corp Trend Forecast reveals that 'vegetarian' is still the number one searched food term across News Corp platforms, with an increase of 15 per cent since March, and vegan is number four with a 19 per cent increase. Meeting the increased demand for plant-based produce will be essential moving forward, and even those producing meat can find ways to complement this trend.







## Cooking at home

According to a June Food and Agribusiness Sector Outlook from KPMG, now that cafes and restaurants are less accessible, there has been an increase in basic, simple home cooking, as well as an equal and opposite trend towards 'five-star' chef-style home cooking.

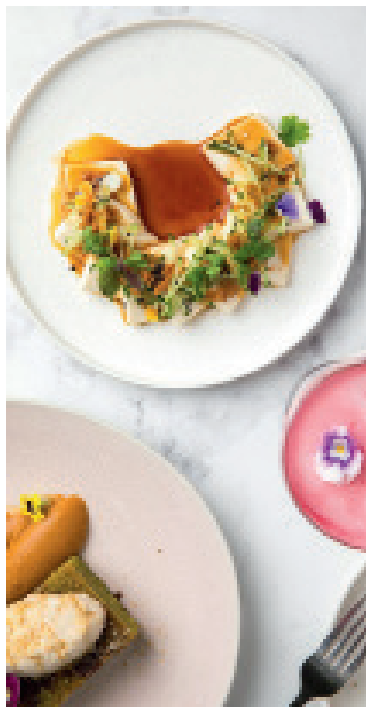
Even once the crisis has passed, a McKinsey study expects a 7 per cent drop in dine-in restaurant eating. This means farmers have a lot more power with retailers as they attempt to secure their supply chains, and providing recipes to showcase your produce is more important than ever.

### Heaven Leigh, Owner

**BODHI RESTAURANT BAR, SYDNEY, NSW**

On a macro level, food trends are driven by consumers, but chefs and restaurateurs play an important role in bringing new flavours, ingredients and cooking techniques into the mainstream market. This in turn influences consumer spending and creates demand. There's also the undeniable influence of social media in fuelling the popularity of veganism and plant-based living.

You can't deny the growing plant-based food trend, especially in countries like the US, UK and here in Australia – now the third-fastest growing market in the world. I don't think farmers should be too reactionary to trends, however I do think it's important to consider demand and the sustainable (environmental and financial) future of farming. Embracing food trends that are here to stay, like the consumer shift towards a more informed, plant-based lifestyle, is important.



## Buying local

Australians have gravitated towards a feeling of 'all in this together' since the pandemic began, and research from the Boston Consulting Group shows that 36 per cent of Australians are buying more locally-grown products compared to before COVID-19. This is the perfect time for farmers to reach out to their local communities and create direct connections with consumers that will create long-term loyalty.



## Four ways farmers can keep ahead of the food trend innovation curve

**1** Speak regularly to your network – wholesalers, retailers, chefs and hospitality business owners – as they will see shifting consumer demands first

**2** Follow global food trends and critics on social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest – something that takes off in a European summer could arrive six months later on Australian plates

**3** Subscribe to industry publications, news alerts and consumer research studies to keep on top of what the industry is talking about

**4** Follow the food you grow on social media using hashtags such as #avocado, #lambrecipes or #oats – you might see a food trend coming before anyone else!