

# Foodie-fest as growers open their gates

By Barbara Gillham

Food lovers, wine buffs and those who just have an interest in where their food comes from, now have another exciting event to add to their calendar, the Horowhenua Taste Trail.

On Saturday November 12 the inaugural event will see growers and producers in Horowhenua open their gates to the public, providing visitors with the chance to meet the growers, see how their businesses operate and perhaps more importantly sample some of their delicious produce.

Geoff Lewis, managing director of Tendertips Asparagus near Levin came up with the idea about four years ago. Today he and his daughter-in-law Catherine who has worked with him in creating the event, and the committee members Kristy McGregor (a rural community member who also works for Federated Farmers) and Kathy Mitchell (also on the local council) are about to see their hard work reach fruition.

Catherine, herself a director of Tendertips, says the Horowhenua offers a wide variety of quality food and beverage producers, but this is not recognised or celebrated to the extent it should be. Geoff agrees and says Horowhenua is an area that is understated.

"The thing about this area is we have excellence in vegetable production, we have excellence in berry production, but because of its small size it doesn't have critical mass like the Hawke's Bay or the Bay of Plenty or Marlborough. However, our strength is in our location



◀ Catherine and Geoff Lewis – with help from Beyonce (centre) - hope to share the story of Horowhenua's excellence in produce, and in doing so increase tourism and economic development in the area. Photo Ivor Earp-Jones.

relative to reasonably high populations, and we would like the opportunity to market the diversity we have into other regions in New Zealand and externally as well."

The Horowhenua Taste Trail has been developed with the intent of showing off the variety of products and the level of excellence to which they are produced. The aim is to share the story with people from outside the area, and to ultimately increase tourism and economic development in the region.

The nine producers who will be showcasing their produce this year are Tendertips Asparagus, Woody's Free Range Pork, Woodhaven Gardens, Levin Eel Trading, Ohau Wines, RJs Licorice, Genoese Pesto, Turks Poultry, and there will also be a farm tour of a local dairy farm.

Although not all are vegetable growers, all are local producers and will provide a variety of properties for people to visit.

Each property will have a food truck on site where visitors will be able to sample some of the wonderful food that each farm produces.

Catherine says the target market for this year is primarily the Kapiti Coast and locals, but in coming years they will be pushing into Wellington and other regions.

"We have got future plans for years to come, obviously we want this to grow and build and we already have a number of producers who are on our list for next year.

"It's taken a lot of planning and organising, it's been a big job."

Geoff has always said the smallness of the region has been their constraint.

"Now we have to turn that constraint into an opportunity. What we are saying is this is an extension of understanding food and the location of the Horowhenua, and the diversity of what is produced here, there's variety."

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With a Facebook page up and running, anyone interested in attending the Festival will be able to download a map of all the properties taking part. Catherine says it will be easily accessible and people can look at the map and decide to visit as many or as few locations as they wish to.

"There's no cost other than paying for any food you buy," says Geoff. "There was a suggestion that we have it all on one site but I was very much against that personally, because I think the story is really about understanding where it's produced and processed, whatever the product is. The whole concept is actually two things, how it's produced and where it comes from."

Most producers where they can will be running a tour of their property. Catherine says anyone who comes to Tendertips will be able to see the packhouse, and see the asparagus coming in, being graded and bundled up ready to go to the shops.

While the organising team are doing the branding of the event and the publicity, exhibitors will be responsible to manage and resource their own sites.

"Anything like parking, their food truck, they have to arrange themselves," says Geoff. "That's their responsibility."


Producers will open their gates from 10am until 4pm to sell their produce and

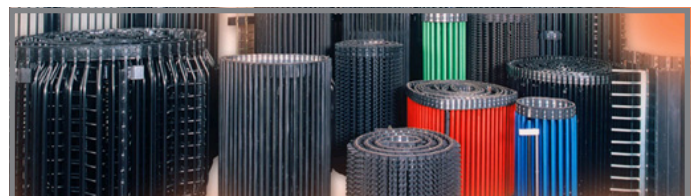
share the story of their products either through tours, chatting to visitors, video or visual displays.

They will also all be profiled in a trail brochure that will take people on a food journey through the Horowhenua District for the day.

Although this year's inaugural event is for one day, it is planned that the Horowhenua Taste Trail will in future be an annual two-day event as more producers come on board and its popularity grows.

Catherine says she believes the variety of food and beverage coupled with the level of excellence to which it is produced in the Horowhenua, provides a unique opportunity to showcase and ultimately promote the district.

"We have a long-term vision", she says, "of growing this festival over the coming years so that it can be a self-sustaining and a key event for the district." 



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