

Certified organic meats

Organic Wagyu – an Australian first on the menu in NSW

» Innovation in the meat market could be one way forward in leaner economic times, if the success of the nation's only **Australian Certified Organic** Wagyu producer is anything to go by.

By Jaime Newborn

Following the unprecedented sale of 5,500 organic Wagyu burgers at the recent 'Taste of Sydney' festival, Rob Lennon from *Gundooee Organics* (East of Dunedoo, NSW), says his unique organic Wagyu meat product is striking a chord with savvy consumers, high end restaurants and butchers.

Ironically, the reason could well be to do with a nation that is tightening their belts.

Gundooee's 'certified organic Wagyu' delivers a product with a marble score of 3 or 4, compared to a marble score of 11 or 12 for conventionally produced grain-fed Wagyu.

"The lower marble score, and the fact that cattle are not grain fed in feed lots (*feed lots are prohibited in organic production, but are a key feature of conventional Wagyu production*) have seen a strong surge of interest from health conscious Wagyu lovers, or those concerned about ethically produced food" says Rob.

Certified organic Wagyu cattle at Gundooee are raised on a diet of perennial native pasture, and stock grazed by rotation in open paddocks. Any extra nibbles are strictly monitored to give natural feed top priority.

"Cattle are also able to access green oat crops sown into native pasture (pasture cropping) during winter; copra meal (ground coconut husk); and occasionally some organic grain, when extra feed is necessary," says Rob.

Rob says that while it's not the traditional way to produce Wagyu, it has turned what began as "an interesting idea" into a product with distinct flavour, texture, and real health benefits.

"Wagyu has been recognised for a better omega 3:6 ratio, a greater proportion of mono un-saturated fat, and CLA's (*Conjugated Linoleic Acids – known for their anti-carcinogenic properties, as well as being anti-inflammatory agents*). On top of this, organic production is associated with a range of health and environmental benefits," he says.

"It makes a great combination."

Rob – who graduated with an associate diploma in Farm Management from *Marcus Oldham Farm Management College* in 1987 - says focusing on the health of the land can literally leave a better taste in the mouth of the consumer.



"Rob's efforts on-farm are now being served by some of Sydney's top chefs, including *Good Food Guide's* 2008 'Chef of the Year', Justin North."

"Healthy soils are our greatest farming priority – they lead to healthier plants and healthier animals with a more natural meat flavour."

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Justin has become a firm advocate of organic Wagyu, featuring Gundooee meat in his Sydney restaurants *Bécasse, Etch and Plan B*.

"We're keeping our Wagyu quite exclusive," says Rob. "We want our meat to be available to all Australians for 'special occasions', but we are selective in choosing retailers and distributors who understand and support our unique approach."

"Whether you're a farmer or running a restaurant, it's about taking the time to try things a bit differently, and ensuring a quality product."

Holly Vyner, BFA General Manager, says organic Wagyu is another example of the level of innovation characteristic of Australian organic operators.

"Organic is a relatively small but rapidly growing market connected to some 'big issues' including sustainability, the environment, and health," she says.

"Organic operators are constantly looking for new ways to supply the growing demand for healthy and environmentally responsible products." ◆◆