

Greater Sydney has a new breed of small-scale producers, many of them tree-changers striving to live more sustainably, and passionate about supplying their communities with fresh organic produce straight from paddock to table (or office). Meet some of our favourite local makers.

BY BRIAR JENSEN

# PASSIONATE PRODUCERS OF GREATER SYDNEY



## FLORAL BY NATURE

Having studied floristry and horticulture at Richmond TAFE, Blue Mountains local and mother of three, Celine Watz, was working as a florist when she developed Graves' Disease (hyperthyroidism). Re-evaluating her lifestyle, she realised she was exposed to a cocktail of harmful chemicals in the commercially produced cut flowers she handled daily. Determined to heal herself by eliminating toxins and living a healthier life, she sadly quit her job.

Then she came across the slow flower movement in America. "It lit a fire in my belly and I've not looked back," says Celine. She immediately started experimenting with growing organic flowers in her Medlow Bath backyard. Locals embraced her chemical-free blooms and Floral by Nature was born. Celine and husband Tristan already owned acreage in the Kanimbla Valley, so commenced growing flowers organically on a larger scale. Despite difficulties including disease, grasshoppers, wallabies and drought, Celine grows 10-15 varieties per season of heirloom and long-vase-life flowers, including dahlias, sunflowers, paper daisies and celosia.

She home delivers mixed bouquets weekly between Hartley and Hazelbrook, offers affordable wedding flowers, floral confetti and edible flowers, and runs floral-crown and wreath making workshops. Best of all, she has cured herself while doing what she loves.

[www.floralbynature.com.au](http://www.floralbynature.com.au)



## FIVE SERVES PRODUCE

Five Serves is the brainchild of Alice Warner, who after 10 years as a primary teacher switched school bureaucracy for the great outdoors. Following a degree in sustainable agriculture and food security at Western Sydney University, she leased a plot of land, complete with mature pecan trees, from Wheen Bee Foundation at Richmond, and started her Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) venture.

CSA customers support Alice by paying upfront for organically grown vegetables, which she delivers to their door weekly or fortnightly, or they collect from the farm, where she holds regular open days to showcase her organic and soil regeneration principles. It hasn't been easy though. Apart from extreme weather, she's had to educate customers about the seasonality of produce and provide recipes for unfamiliar vegetables. Finding staff has been a challenge too, but she's happy with her current team. "They are all my age, we've all got kids, they want to do this because they're passionate about it," she says.

Alice delivers mixed vegetable hampers to families in the Hawkesbury, Hills, Blue Mountains and Penrith areas, and supplies Blue Mountains Food Co-Op in Katoomba and Lyttleton Stores in Lawson.

[www.fiveservesproduce.com.au](http://www.fiveservesproduce.com.au)



## HEBRON FARM

After a seven-year search for a hobby farm, Fiona Harris, an intensive care nurse now working for the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry, and husband Stephen, who runs their three retail wine stores, purchased Hebron Farm, a 25-hectare property with 2.5km of water-frontage on the Colo River at Lower Portland. A country getaway for their Bondi family of five children aged 19 to five-years, they first introduced chickens and sold the free-range eggs through their stores. While renovating the property's two dwellings, they planted an organic kitchen garden with heirloom vegetables.

Images of the heirloom varieties on social media prompted head chef of IT company Canva, to contact them about supplying their Surry Hills office, which provides breakfast and lunch for staff. Jointly, they established a market garden on the property, which despite ducks eating seedlings and eagles swiping hens, supplies all Canva's fresh produce. The farm also hosts a seasonal volunteer weekend for staff in return for help in the garden.

Hebron Farm now has cattle, goats, an orchard and edible native garden, and Airbnb farm-stay guests are welcome to enjoy the garden produce.

[www.hebronfarm.com.au](http://www.hebronfarm.com.au)







## WILLOWBRAE CHEVRE CHEESE

It's 24 years since Karen Borg, a project manager, her architect husband David, and two young daughters vacated the city for a country lifestyle and settled on two-hectares at Wilberforce. An avid cheese-lover, Karen decided to make her own. "Farm women have been making cheese in their kitchen for hundreds of years," she says, "So I thought, what the hell, I'll give it a go."

She famously bought two goats and a cheese-making book. Karen's commitment to quality (she's a self-confessed control freak) saw Willowbrae cheeses winning awards within months. "From two goats we ended up with six the next year and it grew from there," she says. The herd of Toggenburg Anglo-Nubian cross goats rose to 150, but has dropped back to 48 due to drought. It's labour-intensive, 24/7 work; goats are milked twice a day and it takes 10lt of milk to make 1kg of cheese, which Karen does by hand, ensuring waste water from production goes back onto the pasture.

It's Willowbrae's commitment to goat husbandry that's key to their quality artisanal cheeses, milk and yoghurt, which are available at farmers markets around Sydney.

[www.willowbraechevrecheese.com.au](http://www.willowbraechevrecheese.com.au)

## PERMACULTURE SYDNEY INSTITUTE (PSI)

After 10 years as a community social worker, Penny Pyett's desire for a more sustainable life led to a diploma in horticulture and a passion for permaculture, which she implemented in her Ryde backyard. She taught permaculture at TAFE and helped establish numerous community gardens. Eager to practice 'permie' principles on a larger scale, she, and partner Professor Geoffrey Hawker, purchased Pumpkin Farm in Upper Macdonald, St Albans and established PSI.

Later they bought Bandusia Retreat, across from the farm, transforming it into eco-accommodation and PSI HQ, hosting interns and WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms). They have built kitchen gardens and a food forest utilising aquaponics, wicking beds and mandala gardens, home to turkeys, ducks, chooks and quails. Penny's permaculture practices initially received a mixed reaction from local farmers, but they have subsequently learnt from each other, and she says they now have a lovely integration in the valley. Penny also initiated Valley Veg, collecting produce from small organic growers to deliver locally.

PSI hosts permaculture workshops at Bandusia and around Sydney for urban gardeners and hobby farmers, and is starting a Farm Share Program, whereby city dwellers can have their own allotment for growing organic produce with PSI support. \*

[www.permaculturesydneyinstitute.org](http://www.permaculturesydneyinstitute.org)

