

Koala Country Orchards



CHERRIES ON TOP IN HEALTHY EATING

Cherries are rich in vitamin C, fibre and phytonutrients, especially anthocyanidins which also give the cherry its red hue and promote cardiovascular health and memory function.

Cherries also provide beta-carotene, potassium, and quercetin. Quercetin is a natural antihistamine and anti-inflammatory bioflavonoid, thus cherries can lower the risk of asthma and some allergies.

A preliminary study by the U.S. Agricultural Research Service suggests cherries may reduce arthritic inflammation and other inflammatory conditions.

Cherries also contain melatonin as well as ellagic acid, a powerful anti-cancer compound. Further, cherries are high in malic acid, which is important in the production of energy and possibly beneficial for sufferers of fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Cherry picking the best produce for Christmas

The lead up to Christmas at Koala Country Orchards is a hectic time of year.

The orchard, whose main orchard lies on the Maroondah Highway in Yarck (approximately 150km north east of Melbourne in Victoria), sells twenty per cent of its cherries in a one-week period during the festive season.

“Our entire infrastructure is geared up for that week,” says Michael Rouget, Koala Country Orchard’s Managing Director.

While the Christmas week is vital to the orchard’s operations, Michael says its closer relationship with Coles is starting to give sales during other times of the year a lift.

“At different times of the year, we work closely with Coles on promotional activities to give sales a boost,” says Michael.

“The direct relationship we have with them allows us to work more closely with them in areas such as forward planning which then lets us to make the most of opportunities come harvest time.”

And so far all indicators point to some good opportunities this summer.

“This season’s looking good with a great crop,” says Michael. If we can get some dry weather at harvest time, it will be great.”

And Coles will be there every step of the way.

“We’ll meet again with Coles to confirm our initial thoughts around the harvest, so they can best plan for the coming months,” says Michael.

“Over the past couple of years, we’ve really developed more of a partnership approach with Coles in managing the category – and that benefits both of us.”

The more we foster the relationship, the more we can see the opportunities that exist for cherries,” says Michael.

“Five years ago, we weren’t in that position and we tended to speculate a lot more – the partnership we now have has given us a lot more confidence.”

Investing in the future Expanding the orchards

“We’ve done a lot of development over the past five years,” says Michael.

“One of the most significant changes has been our investment into expanding into other areas – an early region and a late region.”

The early region is in Cobram, 200 kilometres to the north of the original orchard in Yarck, while the late region is a mere 40 kilometres up the road in Strathbogie. However the higher altitude (400 metres higher) of this region extends Koala Orchard’s growing season.

It also allows Koala Country Orchards to provide Coles with a longer line of consistent quality and volume.

Innovation and quality of life Sustainable cherries

“We are committed to continue and improve our efforts of producing the highest quality cherries in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way,” says Michael.

“We also strive to maintain a position as industry leaders in fruit production techniques, fruit quality, packing, marketing, innovation, and business performance.”

Koala Country Orchards aims for excellence in every facet of their company.

“Not only do we want to provide our families and employees with financial security, but also continue to provide a great lifestyle and an opportunity to fulfil our professional and personal goals.”



A FAMILY HISTORY

Koala Country Orchards is a family owned and run company with a proud history in the cherry industry.

In 1944 Reginald Rouget and his wife Mary purchased 26 acres of land in the township of Wandin in the Yarra Valley. There they planted various types of berries and cherries.

Their three sons John, Max and Brian left school at an early age to work hard on the family business. The company name 'R.J Rouget & Sons' was born and it became the cornerstone of the widely spread Rouget family. Wives, husbands, siblings, children and now grandchildren have worked in the business and taken with them fond memories of cherry time.

The tradition lives on today under the name 'Koala Country Orchards'. Upon migrating to Yarck, the new company name was inspired by the abundance of koalas inhabiting the property.

Now owned by John & Brian's sons and their wives, Simon and Alison & Michael and Lisa Rouget, and supported by a team of dedicated professionals, over 350 acres of cherries are farmed spanning seven properties throughout Victoria. Cherry harvest in the summer months employs up to 400 people, making Koala Country Orchards one of the largest cherry producers in the country.

Innovation and quality of product A quality lifestyle

This quality of lifestyle is reflected in Koala Country Orchards' cherries.

"Exceptional tasting cherries are the cornerstone of our company," says Michael.

"Every decision from the soil to the box is directed toward achieving the highest quality eating experience for our customers, that's what drives us."

Koala Country Orchards continually develops efficient production methods, trial new technology, and explore new varieties from around the world to ensure our customers receive the best fruit available.

"It is the taste of the fruit that drives us," says Michael.

"From the ground up, keeping soils well balanced and biologically active, we aim for a quality product using sustainable practices. Our trees are pruned to produce premium cherries that are harvested as mature fruit for maximum flavour."

Once picked, Koala Country Orchard's hydro cooling maintains fruit quality, and a large packing staff at our one their centrally located packing facilities, ensures the consistency of fruit.

Sustainability

Working with nature

"Sustainable farming practices underpin the quality and superior flavour of our fruit," says Michael.

"We are committed to preserving and working with nature as much as possible. Particular attention is paid to soil health with mulches and composts playing a key role in keeping our soils well balanced and biologically active."

Beyond the soil, extensive pruning and tree training techniques are used to maximise fruit size and quality. Fruit is harvested as mature as possible for maximum flavour, and post-harvest handling techniques are amongst the best in the world. Use of the most up to date hydro cooling, grading and packing equipment allows for gentle and precise handling of our premium product.





Q&A

with Michael Rouget, Managing Director, Koala Country Orchards

Does your relationship with Coles help provide further insights into the needs of consumers?

Yes. Coles has a great retail knowledge – they know what consumer expectations are as well as their buying habits. This enables us to grow the product the consumer wants, when they want it and maximise our sales.

While we have a pretty good indication on this ourselves, it does provide us with a lot of reassurance to have these insights confirmed. It helps us on the path to growing the right product the consumer wants – and that's the key to any business.

How important is Coles in helping Koala Country Orchards meet its business objectives?

To be successful in this business requires a very long-term view and a lot of planning. And it takes a lot of money and time – five to ten years – to get in a position to provide volume.

We saw a trend a number of years ago and took the punt. Having Coles recognise this and come on board with a partnership approach is great. We've worked hard to build recognition for our brand and this is something Coles has recognised and values – and as a result, sells more of our product.

This in turn has enabled us to become a direct supplier and that benefits us, Coles and the consumer.

Does Coles also help Koala Country Orchards continue to be at the forefront of new products?

Yes. New products are at the front of our minds. And although they are largely our initiative, by working closely with Coles and utilising their retail knowledge, we have a greater understanding of what lines consumers are interested in.

On product types and innovation, how are you trying to provide Coles with a point-of-difference?

Coles' initiative in sourcing more of their produce directly from suppliers is providing customers with fresher and cheaper produce. We are doing a lot of things with them, particularly in marketing and promotion. An example of this is the two-kilogram Christmas-designed box of premium-quality cherries. We're also doing a 400 gram premium punnet for Coles Finest Range, which will be available in stores where they know they have consumers interested in an upper-end product.

SOME CHERRY PICKED STATS

20

The percentage of cherries sold in the lead-in week to Christmas.

66

The number of years since Reginald Rouget and his wife Mary bought 26 acres in Wandin.

350+

The number of acres now in production at Koala Country Orchards.

400

The number of people employed by Koala Country Orchards in the summer months.

2kg

The size of the special Christmas designed box of premium quality cherries exclusive to Coles this Christmas.

400m

The extra elevation at Koala Country Orchards' Strathbogie property that allows it to extend the growing season.