

CULTIVATE WA

THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

December 2013 Volume 2

STRIDING AHEAD

Future plans for
Claremont Showground

COUNTRY WOMEN WITH CLOUT

MARY NENKE AND LIZ BRADSHAW - MAKING A DIFFERENCE

THE DAILY RIND

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH CHEESE JUDGE RUSSELL SMITH

A MAN OF MANY HUES HUGH HARDING LOOKS BACK





CULTIVATE WA

December 2013 | Volume 2

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 4 A Renaissance**
Mapping out the future for the Showground
- 6 Quiet Achiever**
Hugh Harding under the spotlight
- 8 2013 IGA Perth Royal Show**
Non-stop turnstiles!
- 10 Shooting from the hip**
David Thomas' travels from battle fields to boardrooms
- 12 Rural Achiever**
Mary Nenke champions farmers
- 14 Young Blood**
Liz Bradshaw's country conversion
- 15 Study is a Winner**
Tuning in to a scholarship
- 16-19 The Big Cheese**
Dairy judge Russell Smith

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello and welcome to the second edition of our magazine, Cultivate WA.

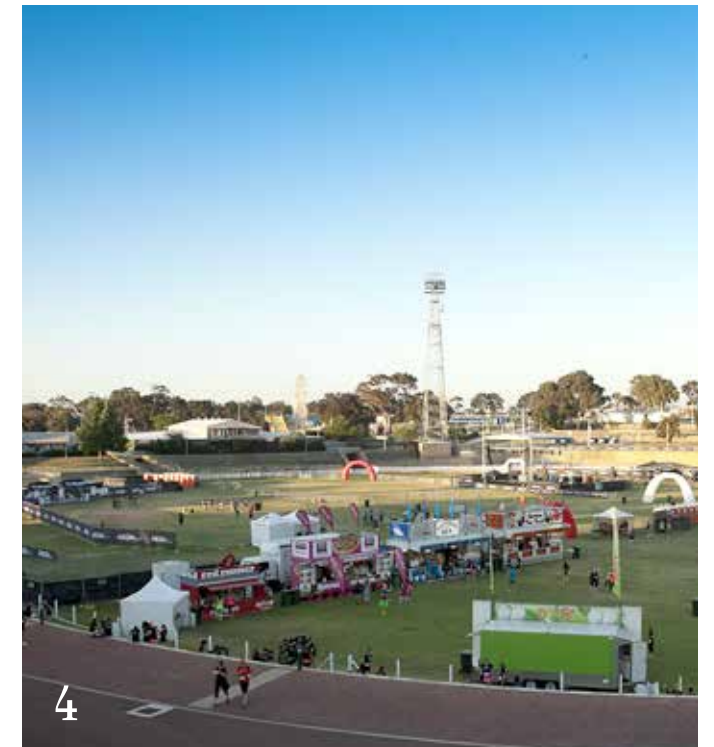
We hope you enjoy this issue, which looks at future plans for Claremont Showground, rural women making an impact and gives a behind the scenes glimpse at dairy judging, as well as an overview of one of our most successful Shows ever!

Hugh Harding, President
The RAS of WA

CONTACT US

If you would like information about any of the articles please email us at cultivatewa@raswa.org.au

Publisher: Royal Agricultural Society of WA
Claremont Showground, 1 Graylands Road
Claremont WA 6010 | Telephone: 08 6263 3100



ROAD MAP FOR THE FUTURE

CLAREMONT SHOWGROUND, WA'S ICONIC COMMUNITY, SPORTING AND CULTURAL VENUE, HOME TO THE IGA PERTH ROYAL SHOW AND 250 EVENTS GENERATING TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO THE STATE ECONOMY ANNUALLY, IS SET TO UNDERGO A RESURGENCE

The RAS, focusing on the need to ensure future planning maintains and enhances the Showground's important role as a State resource, has enlisted the West Australian firm Hames Sharley to develop a concept plan.

Mr Hugh Harding, President of the RAS of WA, says the objective is to provide the State with a world class asset.

"We wanted a WA firm that knew our history and understood the significance of the Showground to generations of West Australians. We feel this is important in appreciating our priorities for the future," says Mr Harding.

"The RAS identified the need to be more strategic in its approach to the use of the Showground, which has ageing infrastructure and buildings that are not compatible with the range of activities and uses required by the WA community."

ADDING TO THE COMMUNITY

According to Mr Harding, one of the key outcomes is to have a viable business model which returns enough surplus to the RAS to improve educational facilities and add value to the Perth Royal Show.

"The Show brings agriculture to life for hundreds of thousands of people who visit the eight day event each year.

"The Showground is the only venue in Perth suitable to host large scale music festivals. The handful of

these events alone generate \$16 million in annual economic impact to WA," says Mr Harding.

Mr Harding says the RAS has spent almost a year working with stakeholders to realise the potential of this venue, which entices close to one million people every year.

"We are confident that Hames Sharley can draw on their experience gained from around the country and globally to help us achieve these objectives."

WHAT TO EXPECT

Mr Harding says the concept plan will be a road map for the organisation to travel on for the next 100 years, so decisions can be made with a long term view.

"The deliverable next March will be multiple ideas or concepts that will be assessed initially by the RAS Council. Some of those ideas may need revision, some may be discounted, some ideas may fit perfectly.

"We have already developed a set of criteria through a process of stakeholder engagement over the past year. Education facilities and Royal Show infrastructure are our top priorities.

"WA company Catalyse has been used to carry out research with local residents, showgoers and corporate partners and we undertook a number of workshops with different stakeholder groups in 2012 and the beginning of 2013.

"Once the concept plan is developed we will go back out to stakeholders and ask for their feedback and comment. This is important as we may have missed some opportunities and it will also give us the chance to identify any issues that we have not foreseen.

"A long term view will be taken. We estimate that the first stage of the redevelopment will be completed within five years with other stages to follow."

Mr Harding says the RAS is eager to explore synergies with potential partners.

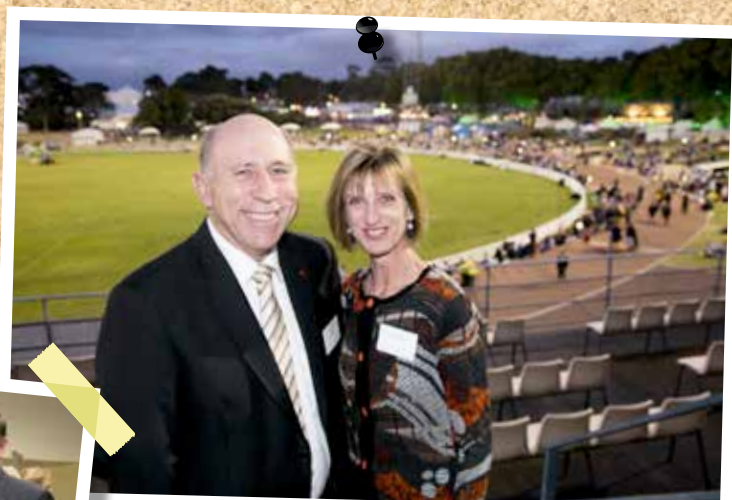
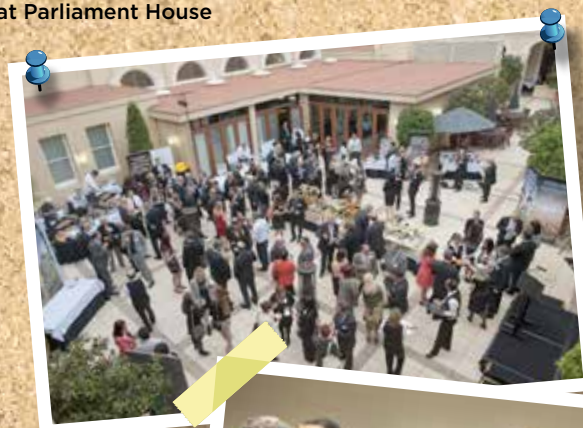
SHOWCASE

SOCIAL HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS YEAR'S SHOW

Great food, great wine and excellent company led to the success of the President's Cocktail Party, the Official Opening Ceremony of the 2013 IGA Perth Royal Show and the Parliament House Cocktail Party.

Below: Guests mingle in the courtyard at Parliament House

Below: Minister for Agriculture and Food Ken Baston and Robin Baston



Right: Tonya McCusker, Sheila Whittaker, Andrew Carr, Malcolm McCusker



Above: Robert Wilson, Sharron Orwin, Marian Park, Dale Park



Above: Chocoholics flock to the free samples of Nakamura award winning products

Above: Gavin Crane, John Seabrook, Liz Bradshaw, Simon Williamson, Stacey Bell



MAN OF MANY HUES

FOR SOMEONE WHO FELT RELUCTANT TO TAKE ON THE PRESIDENT'S POSITION AT THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF WA, HUGH HARDING HAS NOT BEEN BACKWARD IN COMING FORWARD, NOT ONLY IN MAINTAINING A HIGH PROFILE AND EXHAUSTING SCHEDULE, BUT ALSO IN MAKING HIS OWN MARK ON THIS NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION

It was of little surprise to many in the agricultural world who have crossed paths with this former farmer and stock agent when he took the helm of the RAS in 2011.

For this mild-mannered and softly spoken man, who has a lifelong affinity with rural life, is a quiet achiever.

His farming experience was gained in stud Hereford and commercial cattle, stud Dowsett and Corriedale sheep, commercial sheep and growing crops – grain.

As a stock agent, Mr Harding gleaned extensive knowledge in selecting and marketing stud Merinos, commercial sheep and cattle, while his exhaustive management experience was earned when he moved into Wesfarmers management.

Mr Harding's expertise was sought as branch manager of Morawa, Merredin and Geraldton before the eastern seaboard beckoned.

"Wesfarmers bought out Dalgety and I was asked to move to New South Wales as State Manager," recalls Mr Harding.

A transfer back to WA by Wesfarmers saw Mr Harding slot into the role as General Manager of the South West followed by a stint as State Livestock and

Key Account Manager in Perth before he was headhunted by Harvey Beef as General Manager for their Livestock Operation.

As Mr Harding's reputation grew, other organisations sought him out, including the Pastoralist and Graziers' Association.

He became the Secretary of the WA Livestock Salesmen's Association looking after the sales yard owned by Elders and Landmark, around WA.

Mr Harding's involvement with the Royal Agricultural Society spans most of his life, with involvement in various committees and as a former Councillor in Charge of Sheep. In 2008 he was elected as Vice President before taking up his three year 'term of office' as President in 2011.

"Agriculture has been my passion for all my life and joining the RAS gave me a good opportunity to promote agriculture. It also enabled me to express opinions and use my experience to guide the organisation," he says.

In his stint as President he has overseen the growth of the RAS school incursion program - Farm 2 School - which has been rolled out to 35,000 children in 85 schools throughout WA during the past three years.

"I am a strong supporter of young people gaining a better understanding of agricultural products and where they come from."

One initiative that is particularly important to Mr Harding is the Farm 2 Food exhibition, introduced to the 2013 Show.

"Education about agriculture is the number one priority of the RAS and we feel Farm 2 Food pressed all the right buttons in terms of being educational, engaging and entertaining.

"It is critical that children understand where their food comes from. The idea of involving children by encouraging them to identify with farming by becoming 'junior farmers', getting their tractor licence and hopping on a cattle crush, was fun and novel."

The overwhelming success of Farm 2 Food will see it back bigger and better in 2014.

Mr Harding - who is married to his artist wife, Laraine and has three adult children - can soon look back on a successful three years. Not bad for a country boy who left school at 17 not knowing what he wanted out of life!

SHOW AND TELL

A RESOUNDING SUCCESS - WITH A CAPITAL S - DEFINES THE 2013 IGA PERTH ROYAL SHOW

With 450,000 visitors passing through the gates - achieving our second highest attendance on record - and overwhelmingly positive community feedback, the 2013 Show surpassed expectations, especially when you take into account the opening weekend clash with the Fremantle Dockers Grand Final and wet weather throughout Show week.

The Show boasts the largest exhibition of animals in Western Australia with 10,000 animals, more than 15,000 competition entrants, 10,000 trophies, ribbons, awards, rosettes and certificates awarded, 600 small businesses, 100s of entertainers and close to \$100,000 worth of fireworks giving a dazzling and explosive finale to the end of each day during the annual extravaganza.

There were 392 entertainers, 310 performances, 96 hours of entertainment daily and 768 hours of entertainment over the eight day event.

The Show is a valuable platform to promote and celebrate all that is excellent within West Australian agriculture.

There is no other WA community event like the IGA Perth Royal Show and it would be impossible to develop and deliver such a unique, large-scale event without the contribution offered by all involved, including our exhibitors, sponsors, partners, suppliers and 2,000 volunteers.

The annual \$3 million investment by the RAS to coordinate competitions promoting agriculture, food and the arts at the IGA Perth Royal Show is one venture that pays off.

And thanks to the State Government having allocated funds to ensure children aged 12 years and under had free entry to the Show, just under 100,000 youngsters were treated to a feast of agricultural marvels, the opportunity to take a look at a wide variety of farm animals, talk to the farmers, enjoy world-class entertainment, and take part in this year's new initiative - Farm 2 Food.

Designed to help kids understand where their food comes from, the Farm 2 Food Pavilion was visited by about 200,000 people. It was particularly popular with the 25,000 youngsters who had great fun with a number of activities including digging for potatoes, egg grading and milking fibre glass cows!

In their own specially designated kitchen children made 1,200 pizzas and fruit rockets. Having jumped on board an essential farm vehicle, 5,000 tractor licences were given out; they licked their way through 16,000 samples of honey on popsticks and sifted 100 kilos of lupin flour.

"We have had wonderful feedback from parents about our new Farm 2 Food exhibit which has really engaged children about where their food comes from," said Hugh Harding, President of the Royal Agricultural Society of WA.

"I know children will have walked away with a richer appreciation of farmers and a deeper knowledge of the origin of the food they eat."

A FORTUNATE LIFE

FROM DEFENDING HIS COUNTRY TO ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS, RAS COUNCILLOR DAVID THOMAS AIMS TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

This former soldier, who spent 21 years in the armed forces - including a decade wearing the brown beret of the SAS, the elite brigade for which only the toughest are enlisted - is also a force to be reckoned with on the level playing field of Civvy Street.

Mr Thomas has taken the strong leadership skills he developed in the army and applied them to all aspects of his life.

"The army was my first employer for the first 21 years of my working life and the only life I knew, so when I left at the age of 37 it was with much trepidation," he explains.

Having worked in the Australian Army's catering Corp, it was natural to move into the facility management area of the resources sector.

"Initially it was quite daunting", admits Mr Thomas.

"I had to understand how to work within the industry and unionised operations, particularly in construction, within remote areas.

"I did find my army training to be a valuable skill as the defence force had taught me how to work in a team environment with subordinates and peers."

Following a lifelong dream to operate his own business, five years ago Mr Thomas established his own company - R2R Services Pty Ltd and its subsidiaries.

A small boutique facilities management company as opposed to a giant of the industry, the Subiaco-based outfit is wholly WA owned and operated and is a real family-affair.

Wife Sharon is part-owner and eldest daughter Rachel, in her early 30s, is her father's personal assistant, receptionist and face of the company.

"The first contract was with Atlas Iron in Pardoo, outside Port Hedland, which we held for two years," recalls Mr Thomas.

"It was a remote type of camp, known as a pioneer camp, and mainly for construction and geologist type work."

Since then R2R Services has gone on to fulfil numerous contracts, with the remote villages accommodating between 50 to 400 people. They are 'turn key' operations - in other words, put the key in the door and go in!

"R2R Services also has a business partnership in Mongolia, forming Geomandel Facility Management (GFM) which has been successful in the Oyu Tolgoi project - one of the world's largest globally operating copper and gold mines situated on the edge of the Gobi desert."

Closer to home, Mr Thomas turned his attention to the first indigenous facilities management company, Akudjara, established in partnership with Ngarda Civil and Mining.

"Akudjara provides training, employment and capacity building opportunities to indigenous people in the Pilbara region," explains Mr Thomas.

"We partner with local traditional owners on each contract and work with Ngarda's existing

pre-employment programs to engage local Aboriginal workers from where we operate.

"In this way we will have Aboriginal engagement, inclusion and influence through all levels of our company - from frontline delivery right through to the boardroom."

It is thanks to the influence of his family that the RAS is now also benefiting from Mr Thomas' skills.

"My grandfather operated a grain and feed business in Moorabin, Victoria, while my daughter Melany attended the WA College of Agriculture in Cunderdin from 2003 to 2004, providing the opportunity to be exposed to the agricultural sector.

"Her partner Brad's family has a wheat farm in Cunderdin and Meckering.

"The R2R Services Board chairman Roger Mills owns and operated the award winning Plantagenet Dorper Stud in Mt Barker, which further developed my appetite to understand and be part of the agricultural sector.

"My family has been involved with the RAS for a number of years. Sharon has previously volunteered in the art and craft sections while my daughters are RAS members.

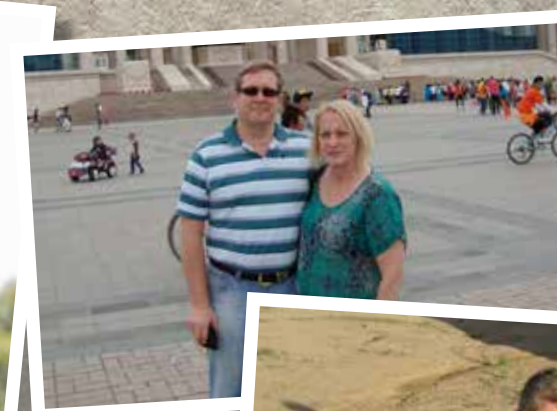
"The RAS is a valued organisation that is providing a significant link between the country and the city.

"I believe that I can bring to the table a wealth of experience, governance and strategic planning that is important for an organisation such as the RAS to grow and be significant for WA's future as a powerhouse in Australia's agricultural development."

In addition, Mr Thomas has served on a number of other committees and boards.

He is currently on the Board of Uniting Care West and is a Fellow of Leadership WA, a not-for-profit organisation providing leadership development, invaluable insights and unique experiences to those from the corporate, not-for-profit and government sectors.

L-R: Emphasising a point at the Claremont Showground, balancing business with personal life with wife Sharon and taking a break at the Mongolian camp



STRUTTING HER STUFF

MARY NENKE, THE WOMAN NAMED AS THE 2013 RURAL COMMUNITY ACHIEVER, HAS LONG BEEN A CHAMPION OF RURAL CAUSES. WHETHER IT'S STARTING A BUSINESS OR PROVIDING A VOICE TO STRUGGLING FARMERS, SHE IS EVER READY TO STEP UP TO NEW CHALLENGES

As a farmer, wife, mother of six, grandmother to 12, sex education counsellor, entrepreneur, trailblazer and now 2013 Rural Community Achiever, Mary Nenke is no stranger to making things happen...

This hard hitting woman who packs a punch when it comes to agricultural involvements is, together with her husband Michael, joint owner of the hugely successful licensed export aquaculture business Cambinata Yabbies, operating from their 400 hectare broad-acre family farm at Kukerin.

A decision to diversify came in 1991 with the collapse of prices for wheat and wool, interest rates of more than 17 per cent, spiralling educational costs and expenditure exceeding income.

The Nenke's eldest son Paul was, in part, instrumental to what was to become the farming enterprise that would bring them international attention.

"Michael's hobby at that time was yabbie farming but it emerged as a new enterprise when Paul caught 50kgs of the crustaceans to sell to wholesalers who were, at that time, oversupplied.

"He tipped them back into the dam only to quickly fish them out again after a call to supply a Perth restaurant with a regular amount of yabbies."

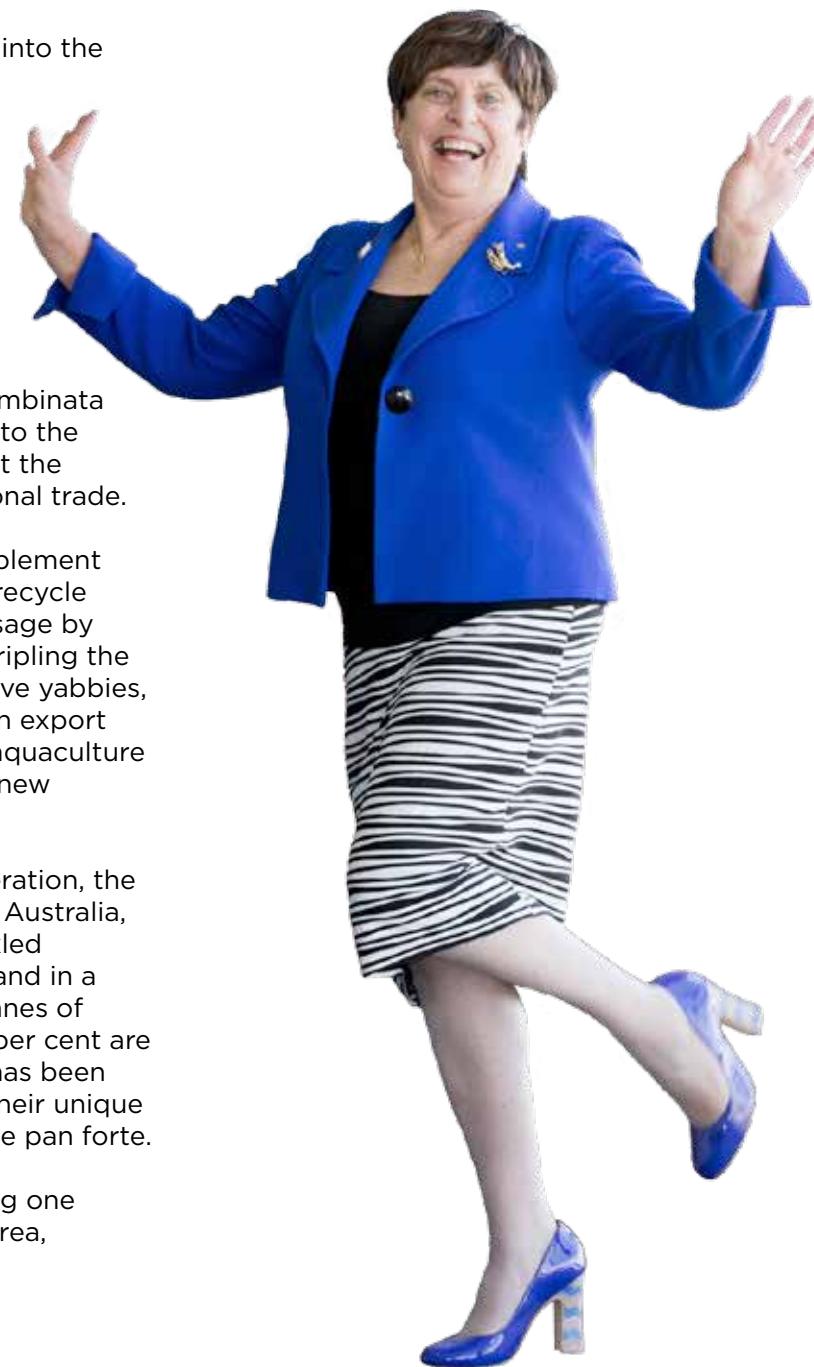
The rest, as they say, is history.

Within three years Cambinata Yabbies had moved into the export market to meet the demands of international trade.

Mary's initiative to implement an industrial plant to recycle water, reducing the usage by 90 per cent thereby tripling the capacity for holding live yabbies, and the inclusion of an export kitchen, ensured the aquaculture products could meet new demands.

The sophisticated operation, the only one of its kind in Australia, currently exports pickled yabbies and abalone and in a good year sells 75 tonnes of yabbies, of which 70 per cent are exported. The range has been complemented with their unique dukkahs and chocolate pan forte.

From initially providing one caterer in the metro area,



Cambinata Yabbies has now claimed established markets nationally and globally - Europe, Asia and the Middle East, as well as America.

Not bad work for a woman who started out believing male farmers dominated rural communities.

"I was fortunate to have a husband who 'allowed' me to be involved in the business," says Mary.

Her traditional views have not held Mary back in encouraging others, particularly women, to grow their businesses into export.

"I believe that if rural Australia is to grow and prosper it must maximise the potential of women and ensure that their talents and leadership is recognised with women taking their equal place 'at the table' of decision making."

According to Mary, life is all about choices. And while many of us would have settled for the sweet success of building and maintaining a sophisticated export operation, that attitude is not within her make-up.

With the driven nature of this quite remarkable woman, it merely served to instigate agenda after agenda.

The wheatbelt farming enterprise, with Mary at the helm, has also branched into the world of

tourism by converting a shearing shed into a function centre and with the building of holiday units.

Each October Mary puts on an elaborate 'Cambinata Extravaganza' - attended by industry heads, movers and shakers, as well as those who just want to eat, drink and be merry!

The occasion is a celebration of the region whereby gourmet food, wines and boutique beers are showcased and WA's top chefs cook mouth-watering produce.

The guests are wined and dined in the transformed 'shearing shed' bedecked with memorabilia, candlelit chandeliers and candelabras, and serenaded by a pianist at a grand piano. Now in its tenth year, the fiesta is listed in the State's top events.

"Farming is an essential service. Without farmers you have no food and without food, you die."

"It is an occasion when city people are linked with the country, meet farmers, enjoy the wildflowers, and get to camp under the stars," says Mary who, following this runaway success,

now caters for a growing number of called-for functions that includes corporate soirees, tour groups and weddings.

It is also one way for city dwellers to understand life on the land and how important agriculture is to this country - and it is for this reason Mary became a 'voice' for the farmers.

In a bid to get the message out that many farmers are in crisis and need intervention Mary formed Farming Champions, and spear-headed an event in Perth titled Farmer on Your Plate, in a bid to get politicians to intervene.

"Farming is an essential service. Without farmers you have no food and without food, you die," says Mary, bluntly.

"Australian farmers and pastoralists have stewardship of more than 60 per cent of our country. This figure is diminishing yearly as debt ridden farming businesses are forced to sell out, with the most attractive offers from China, India, the Middle East and other countries who are looking towards their future food security. And they are choosing the most fertile and productive country.

"Every day I hear disturbing stories about the mental and financial state of some primary producers. Agriculture must be put on top of the political menu."

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

Mary's achievements include:

- Being inducted into WA's Women's Hall of Fame in 2011.
- In 2008 she was featured in the Federal Office for Womens' 'Ms Entrepreneur' film, viewed on Qantas flights and Channel Seven's Today Tonight magazine program.
- In 2007 Mary took out the WA Citizen of the Year Governor's Award for Regional Development; Australian Export Hero.
- That same year Mary was listed as a member of West Australian 100 Local Champions.
- In 2000 Mary was the inaugural winner of the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), Rural Women's Award WA.

TREE CHANGE

MOVING TO THE COUNTRY PAID OFF FOR LIZ



When the city lights dimmed for one young woman she took the opportunity to leave the built-up, fast paced life of this metropolis and headed for life in a rural community.

"My grandparents had a farm and I loved camping so when the opportunity came up to work in the country I jumped at it," says Liz, who recently claimed the title 2013 Rural Ambassador.

Sponsored by the Perth Ambassador Hotel, the Department of Agriculture and Food and coordinated by the Royal Agricultural Society of WA, the Rural Ambassador award recognises the contribution of young leaders who work to promote regional development.

Liz, who grew up in Jandakot and attended Leeming Primary

School, Penrhos College and the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle, has not looked back since moving to Mullewa two years ago to take up a position as Regional Health Promotion Officer.

As Rural Ambassador she will be encouraging other young people to consider living in a rural community.

"It is one of the best things I have ever done and I would encourage other young people to make the move.

"The first couple of months are always going to be tricky but just have patience, work hard and give yourself the opportunity to get to know your community through joining committees and volunteering.

"Professionally the move has given me more experience,

independence and responsibility, which I love.

"Moving from the city to country you become much more aware of the gaps that exist in people's knowledge about rural life."

Liz believes she is well placed to promote the importance of rural health and address the barriers young people face when pursuing career opportunities in the country.

"A big part of my role as Rural Ambassador will be to bring young people together to share experiences, challenges and successes to address some of these barriers and develop strategies to attract and retain young people working in rural areas."

Liz believes the biggest problem facing agriculture is the high Australian dollar. "If the dollar goes up, farmers get less on the international market and profit margins are reduced.

"This is compounded by skill shortages, and attracting and retaining workers on the farm.

"The snowball effect of this is detrimental to small business in rural communities."

Liz was one of five finalists vying for this year's prestigious title and gave judges the unenviable task of choosing a winner.

"The high calibre of finalists meant judges faced a difficult decision, taking a long time to deliberate the final result," says the Royal Agricultural Society of WA Councillor In Charge, Lyn Piper.

SCHOLARSHIP IS MUSIC TO THE EARS

HAVING SPENT HER CHILDHOOD LIVING ON FARMS IN QUEENSLAND AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA, ATTENDING 15 SCHOOLS AND FINISHING YEAR 11 AND YEAR 12 AT AN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, 17-YEAR-OLD JESSICA PERRIN KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT SHE WANTS OUT OF LIFE

With her down-to-earth attitude coupled with a strong determination, this lively young woman - also a talented singer/songwriter, has a habit of claiming awards...

The most recent one has seen her reap a scholarship to the tune of \$12,000.

Jessica, who combines a commitment to agriculture with her passion for music, beat a number of other strong contenders to the Inaugural Agricultural Youth Scholarship, introduced by the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia and the Bendat Family Foundation.

The award, provided for three years to a student undertaking an agricultural related discipline, was presented to Jessica, who is studying Agribusiness at Curtin University's Bentley campus, earlier this year.

It joins a long list of awards she has earned, including the Department of Agriculture

and Food's AgLinkEd Scholarship in 2012, the Australian Defence Force 2011/2012 Long Tan Leadership and Teamwork awards, a Primary Industry Centre for Science Education Industry Placement Scholarship, a Cert II in Agriculture and a Cert II in Conservation and Land Management.

Jessica also walked away with first place in the junior cattle parading competition at the 2011 IGA Perth Royal Show, won the junior wool judging event in 2012 and competed in the national junior wool judging competition held in New Zealand this year.

Jessica's musical prowess - she plays the guitar, piano and ukulele, is learning to play the banjo and can sing - saw her as a finalist at the Boyup Brook Country Musical Festival.

With these accomplishments under her belt and with more, no doubt, to come, Jessica is well and truly 'hitting the high notes'!



Left: Jessica Perrin

**SPENDING YOUR LIFE
DOING WHAT YOU
LOVE AND TRAVELLING
THIS VAST CONTINENT
SOUNDS IDYLIC.
RUSSELL SMITH, CHIEF
JUDGE OF THE PERTH
ROYAL DAIRY SHOW,
WOULDN'T GIVE IT UP
IN A HEARTBEAT**

According to Russell, he didn't plan such a nomadic lifestyle – rather, it evolved thanks to a nudge from a friend who invited him to a judge training workshop following Russell's initiation into the world of judging cheeses.

For 20 years Russell was involved in the consumer end of the cheese industry, having owned a retail shop and cheese distribution business in Canberra. His passion for cheese served as a natural step into the world of assessing which cheese would become an award winning product.

"I realised immediately I had quite an advantage in judging as I would regularly taste 80 to 100 cheeses every week in my retail business," says Russell.

"I didn't sell any cheese I hadn't tasted and I recognised just how finely tuned my palate had become with regard to cheese."

According to Russell there was one slight hitch – a lack of knowledge about where the flavours were coming from.

"So I decided to enrol in a commercial cheese making course run by one of Australia's most renowned cheese educators, Neil Willman, which took me two years to complete at Melbourne University's Gilbert Chandler Centre in Werribee."

With his new-found knowledge in place and realising just how little he really knew about the complexity of the process of cheese making, Russell began making small – 60 litre – experimental batches of cheese at weekends.

"I still make cheese and I am always making tiny adjustments to the recipe to see how this changes the flavours and texture of the cheese. This is essential information I need to keep me in touch with what cheese makers are doing out there, as they constantly tweak their recipes to improve their cheeses," he says.

**CHEESE IN THE
CLASSROOM**

Russell was keen to impart his experience to students, establishing a cheese making program 'Camembert in the Classroom' at schools in Brisbane in 2010.

He then requested a special class for student-made cheese to be included at the Royal Queensland Cheese and Dairy Show – one of the numerous agricultural events he can be found judging at throughout the year.

"I have teachers come along to a one-day workshop to learn how to make Camembert who then take what they've learned into the classroom. The cheeses are then judged by me at a 'Big Day Out' presentation. Sometimes I manage to coax my good friend King Island cheese maker Ueli Berger to join me in judging the student made cheeses – and the competition is fierce!"

So fierce and so good apparently that Russell declares the best of these cheeses are equal or better to those found in your local deli or on a supermarket shelf.

A year after the program was up and running in the classrooms Dairy Australia deemed it to be so successful they began to fund the program in rural Victoria and Sydney. Last year the program was awarded the Peter Doherty Award for innovation in science education by the Queensland Government.

The program has since gone viral – Australia wide!

And the enthusiasm the youngsters show for the program is, according to Russell, infectious.

"Science students particularly find the biochemistry and microbiology of the maturation of Camembert fascinating. The non science students always find it a revelation to see this hard block of cheese transform into a soft, runny paste over the period of five to six weeks. It is such a great opportunity to educate kids on just how some of their food is produced."

"The program comprising the workshops and the Big Day Out were held in Bunbury this year and the schools came from near and far."

They certainly did – Manea Senior College, Bunbury; Cornerstone Christian College; Georgiana Molloy Anglican School and Grace Christian College Busselton; Eaton Community College; Bunbury Cathedral College; Waroona District High School and the Margaret River High School.

DAIRY JUDGING

A man used to capitalising on his skills Russell, topping the contingent of nine dairy experts, was also to be found overseeing the judging of more than 300 products at the Perth Royal Dairy Show – part of the iconic Premium Produce Awards.

"We tasted some excellent products which were very well made and were fine examples of their class. Interstate entries were again strong in the cheese classes with some goat's milk cheese from Tasmania being entered for the first time. A number of yoghurt and dairy dessert entries were also received from interstate," confirms this acclaimed taste tester.

You would be forgiven for thinking this man had enough on his plate with travelling and judging.

Not so – for Russell continues his work in cheese education in other areas too.

"It is such a great opportunity to educate kids on just how some of their food is produced."

This year Dairy Australia published Russell's chef's manual. Russell has also established a series of cheese sensory workshop courses.

"Most of the workshops I do for chefs are for the Electrolux Appetite for Excellence Program where participants from each state have the opportunity to participate in a three to four hour taste master science class where I teach the fundamentals of how and why we taste and also test their individual taste reactions to different flavour compounds.

"This can be applied to all foods of course. As my speciality is cheese, we spend the last hour applying what they have learned to tasting cheeses."

It is a variation of this workshop that Russell will be taking to New York in early 2014.

"I will be working with Chef Leigh Friendon on a science of taste program for the American Cheese Society which will take me to New York in March and Sacramento in July," says Russell, adding he has also just committed to working with cheese professionals in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China next year, too.

This begs the question: how can I become a cheese judge?

Russell has a standard reply to that particular enquiry.

"People are always asking me that, usually eager and mostly young, cheese lovers.

"Little do they realise the level of concentration required over a day to assess anywhere up to 100 cheeses.

"At the end of the day a judge is mentally and emotionally exhausted if they have been putting in the effort to assess each product at the same professional standard."

CHEW AND SPIT

Russell reveals cheese judging is also a profession where chewing and spitting out your food is acceptable.

"You have to spit or your body will react to the kilos of cheese you have consumed in a not very pleasant fashion," he stresses.

"With so many different flavours, judges need to keep their palate fresh by rinsing with water or chewing on a water cracker and sometimes using green apples to refresh, particularly after very strong flavours."

THE DAILY RIND

CONFESSIONS OF A CHEESE JUDGE

“I often get asked: How do you keep trim eating all that cheese?”



Left: Russell Smith in action at the 2013 Perth Royal Dairy Show which is part of the Premium Produce Awards

But there is only so much the palate can take, according to Russell.

“Inevitably your palate does fatigue so reassessing samples judged earlier is a good way to determine if you are still on track. Several of the larger cheese competitions have recently changed to judging only in the morning which is a great improvement for both the quality of judging and for the judges themselves.”

There is also a slight disadvantage for those over the age of 40 years.

“The cells in the taste buds on our tongues are replaced every 10 to 12 days. They work hard! At around your mid-40s all cell replacement slows. As we age our palate gradually diminishes.

“This is a very individual thing so there is no absolute. My observations over the last decade indicate that somewhere in your late 60s to early 70s, many of the subtle flavours you could once taste are no longer detectable.

“So just when you have arrived at a time of life when hopefully you can afford to spend on

expensive food and wine, you may well not be able to appreciate them as earlier in life. What a bummer!”

With his chosen profession you would be forgiven for thinking Russell is erring on the side of well – large!

“I often get asked: ‘How do you keep trim eating all that cheese?’

“Well, I’ve never been trim but I haven’t had to resort to widening the doorways at home. Yet!”

And there is a good reason for that – Russell’s wife, Sally.

“We bought a 25-acre hobby farm in the Bega Valley two years ago. It is part of an old dairy farm that was subdivided in the 90s. Sally always has a long list of jobs that need to be done when I get home.

“So my work changes from one of a somewhat cerebral nature to the very physical and this helps to restore my weight and fitness to pre-judging circuit levels. The farm is my outdoor gym and I love the contrast between the high energy space I inhabit while travelling around Australia and overseas and the slow, relaxed pace of life on the farm.”

That said, Russell’s extensive workload has seen him home about four months within the past two years.

A figure Russell is hoping to extend next year but there is one, slight problem...

“Every time someone offers me a new and exciting opportunity I find it difficult to resist!

“I am often surprised myself just how passionate I can become in any discussion of cheese. The last decade for me has been one of intense study in many different areas of the cheese industry and I guess I’m continually learning and that fuels my passion for cheese and the industry.

“And I just never get tired of tasting cheese. Even at the completion of a day’s judging a fellow judge may approach me for my thoughts on a particular cheese and I never hesitate to taste it.

“Do I have a problem? Probably!,” quips Russell as he rushes off to catch another flight – adding to the more than 120 flights he has clocked up this year.

“BEER MATCHES MUCH

BETTER WITH

CHEESE THAN WINE”

TIPS FROM THE BIG CHEESE

RUSSELL SMITH’S VIEW ON MATCHING CHEESE WITH BEER WILL SURPRISE THOSE OF YOU WHO BELIEVE CHEESE IS THE PERFECT COMPLEMENT TO WINE

“Despite all the hype around cheese and wine, beer actually matches much better with cheese than wine,” confirms Russell.

“I’m sure all the craft beer people would like to hear that,” he adds, following the recent success of artisan-crafted beers competing for supremacy at the Perth Royal Beer Show.

“In general,” says Russell, “the milder the beer the easier it’s going to be to match with cheese.

“Big hoppy beers will need a strong flavoured cheese such as a blue or aged cheddar. Because there are now so many very individual flavour profiles in craft beer, I would suggest pairing your favourite cheeses and deciding on the best matches for yourself.”

Russell’s judging positions for this year include the following:

- Chief Judge at the Perth Royal Dairy Show
- Chief Judge for the Royal Queensland Cheese & Dairy Produce Show
- Chief Judge for the Royal Sydney Cheese & Dairy Produce Show
- Chief Judge for the Australian Wagyu Associations National Competition
- Chairman of Judges for the Royal Queensland Wine & Food Show
- Deputy Judge for the Cuisine NZ Champions of Cheese Awards
- Master Judge for the Australian Grand Dairy Awards
- International Technical Judge for the American Cheese Society, Madison, Wisconsin

LUXURY HAMPERS PROVE A WINNER

When it comes to boasting we are unashamedly - right up there...

The IGA Perth Royal Show does, indeed, attract the crème de la crème of tasty and exquisite produce plus, we have the advantage and privilege of judging and awarding titles and trophies to some of the most deserved exhibitors for their products.

To come under our Premium Produce banner, exhibitors have had to carry off the most prestigious awards.

This year’s prize performing products qualified to be offered to the discerning public with an appetite for top quality goods, in a beautiful wooden presentation case as a ‘limited edition’ – they were a runaway success and we will be offering them again at the 2014 Show.

Take a look at what we had in the hamper:

- 2010 Shiraz Fermoy Estate
- Beetroot Vinaigrette Bumbak
- Dark Chocolate Box Nakamura Chocolates
- Tomato Riesling Relish The Lakehouse, Denmark
- Mango Colada Dessert Sauce, Wallis Mangoes
- Chives and Garlic Camembert, HaVe Cheese
- Cracker Barrel Special Reserve Vintage Cheddar, Lion
- French Style Triple Cream Brie, Blue Cow Cheese
- Blue Cow Crispbread
- Murphy Yetna Extra Virgin Olive Oil



WE'VE GOT SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

2013 IGA PERTH ROYAL SHOW - OUR SECOND BIGGEST ON RECORD!

450,000 visitors, 15,000 competitors, 10,000 prizes awarded, 600 small businesses, 2,000 volunteers, 392 entertainers, 310 performances and 768 hours of free entertainment over the 8 days.

THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF WA

Proudly supporting our community since 1831

Find out more at raswa.org.au

