

FARM GATE ROUNDUP Saturday 17 May 2008

David Mason: 4588 2144 (W); 4572 1337 (H); 0411 128 456

Interviewer: Ian Rogerson

What have you for us this week David

Well Ian you will recall the last time we spoke when Simon was swanning around Europe earlier this year I told you that Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his wife Elizabeth were the first people to do the farm gate trail.

Yes I remember they started off after breakfast from Agnes Banks on horse back and rode all the way up to Kurrajong Heights and back down to arrive in Windsor later that afternoon.

Good memory Ian. They rode a total of 50 miles that day and Mrs Macquarie rode all the way. What I also said was, in doing that they followed the route where many of the original 13 Farm Gate Trail destinations were located when Hawkesbury Harvest started in 2000.

What was the year they did that?

It was in the first week of December 1810. Also later that same week Governor Macquarie proclaimed the establishment of the five Macquarie Towns – Richmond, Windsor, Wilberforce, Pitt Town and Castlereagh. The purpose of those towns was to service the area that became known as the 'bread basket' of Sydney and later the Sydney Food Bowl. Food security was the big issue at the time because hunger was always threatening the burgeoning town of Sydney to the southeast. Now that story created quite a bit of interest.

It was a good story

Well today I am going to add to that story by telling you and your listeners that in October 1815 Governor Macquarie rode over the latest area that has become part of the FGT – that's the areas of the Penrith and Wollondilly local government areas. On Friday 6th October 1815 he and his party came across some of the wild cattle that had given Cow Pastures its name.

Cow Pastures used to be the name for Camden.

That's right. The following day they came across two men who each had a bag of fresh beef on their back. Macquarie quickly established they had killed a wild heifer and promptly had them arrested and escorted to goal in Sydney for trial. Apparently all wild livestock belonged to the King.

Out in the donga without a care in the world and up rides the Governor and the next thing you know you are in the slammer. I suppose by this time food security was not the big issue as it was when he first arrived in the Colony in 1810.

True but right now nearly 200 years later it is again becoming an issue. One of the three big ideas on agriculture to come out of the Rudd Government 2020 summit was there be a new Government body to consider national and global food security. The second idea was that the Government should survey the Northern Territory to determine its suitability as a food bowl. Now the point I want to make here Ian is that people should not think that food bowls means food security. Food bowls are about commodity development and the bottom line \$\$\$. Food security is about a sustainable food culture.

Historically food bowls have not fared very well. The Sydney food bowl has been severely diminished through urban fragmentation of agricultural land. The Murray Darling Basin food bowl is in dire straights because of poor management and drought.

So what does food security mean?

In this period of uncertainty we are entering it means that sustainable food security is about embedding local food production, processing, distribution and consumption right back into urban communities. It is in fact a consumer/community driven (not producer driven or supermarket driven) food culture that takes into consideration, responds to and plays a determinant role in issues such as global warming, bio-security, food safety, pandemics, natural disasters, food terrorism, human/community health, urban ecosystems, urban landscapes, building design, city design, water and waste cycles, and a local/regional balance to globalisation.

Does that mean that all food had to be produced in urban areas?

Not at all. Food will still come through trade and from other parts of Australia however what food security is about is ensuring that if there are times when vegetables or fruit or other essential foods are in short supply or prices start to rise then people can still have access to local fresh food at reasonable prices.

Has that ever happened in Sydney?

It has indeed. It happened in October 2003 and was reported in the Hawkesbury local press when Rod Sherriff the then President of the Free Growers Horticulture Council which represented the more than 1000 market gardeners in the Sydney region said "If it were not for what was coming out of the Hawkesbury there would be very little in the way of leafy vegetables on the Sydney market". This was due to the drought west of the Divide and the unseasonably hot weather in Queensland that was "stewing" the crops in the ground up there.

Certainly food for thought David and certainly something that Hawkesbury Harvest has been addressing since it started. To find out what is happening on the FGT people can go to

www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au