



City of  
Whittlesea

An initiative of WHITTLESEA



*the right  
place for*

# Agribusiness

CASE STUDY:

## Colin and Sally's Organic Lamb and Beef

As part of the Regenerative Agriculture project undertaken in conjunction with Deakin University, five best practice case studies were developed based on interviews with regenerative agriculture practitioners.





## Background

Colin and Sally's is a certified organic, grass-fed sheep and beef farm in the Strzelecki Ranges of South Gippsland. Prior to starting the business, the couple were living and working in Melbourne. Both passionate about accessing and growing good quality, organic food, the move to farming was the right choice for them and a great place to raise their family. In 2008 they purchased the property and made the move southeast.

The enterprise is based on a commercial herd of black Angus cattle and a commercial flock of Wiltshire Poll sheep, with some Wiltshire being recently introduced. The decision to go with these breeds was about accessibility, eating quality and ease of management, particularly regarding the Wiltshire Polls, as they are a self-shedding sheep that doesn't require shearing.

The animals are reared and finished on grass using holistic grazing management on a highly diverse pasture base.

# Fast Facts

## Owner/Business:

Colin and Sally  
Colin and Sally's Organic Lamb and Beef

## Key Farm Outputs:

Organic lamb and beef

## Age:

44 years and 42 years

## Generation:

1st generation. Colin grew up on a hobby farm in the peri-urban area of Ballarat and Sally grew up in Melbourne, although Sally's family has a farming background in Croatia and ran a vineyard in Australia.

## Location:

Dollar, Gippsland Region, Victoria

## Size of farm:

31ha freehold, 30ha leasehold

## Established:

2008. Direct marketing commenced 2013

## Employment:

One person full time, one person part time (total 1.5 FTE)

## Rainfall:

800-1000mm

## Soil Type:

Sandy loam (locally known as coffee rock)

## Land Tenure:

Freehold and leasehold

## Key Markets:

Product only sold through the Community Supported Agriculture Program which is promoted through social media, website, blog and newsletter and involves direct customer contact with individual customer attention.



## Need for change



The consumption of red meat over recent years has become controversial due to the impact of ruminants on the climate through the production of methane, as well as the increasing dependence of the red meat industry on grain fed production systems. This leads to animals being kept in confined living conditions, such as feed lots. These feed lot situations can lead to health challenges and questionable animal welfare outcomes. The impact on climate can also be increased due to the carbon footprint of the grain produced and the reliance of these systems on fossil fuels and synthetic fertilisers.

*“We have actively sought diverse pasture species. Australia had a particularly narrow availability of pasture seeds, with UK and USA having a much broader variety. It was mainly the herbs we were lacking in Australia. Plantain and chicory are now easy to get. We have also sown comfrey, sheep’s parsley, yarrow, burnet, birds foot trefoil, mustard, dandelion amongst others.”*

The regenerative farming approach to livestock production is for these animals to be produced through pasture consumption only, rather than grain. Holistic grazing management systems using perennial pasture have been shown to sequester carbon in soils, making the production of red meat a climate positive process.

*“Animal health is fostered through this diversity by access a broader range of vitamins and minerals. Diversification also assists with pasture pest issues. Polyculture reduces habitat and feed sources for pests.”*

*“We were inspired by the work of Newman Turner and Alan Savory in establishing our grazing management systems on the farm to foster good soil health and to build soil organic matter. Good grazing management means happier, healthier animals and a climate positive production system.”*

# Innovative approach

Given the small size of their farm and number of animals produced, Colin and Sally understood that they couldn't draw an income from their farm if they looked to the traditional commodity market for their beef and lamb.

It was this that prompted them to take a different approach, with one of the first Community Supported Agriculture Programs for meat in Australia.

*“CSA's were more common with vegetable growers, but we knew of examples internationally where they had been developed for meat sales very successfully. We have no issue with selling our product and have an extensive waiting list. We are not even close to meeting demand. It takes only a couple of hours each year to sell out. Sally is the secret weapon – she is excellent at marketing. She is very personable. Responds to every message and makes enormous effort in stewarding these customers. The business is very customer orientated. They want to engage with their farmer, so we provide them with that connection.”*



# Certification



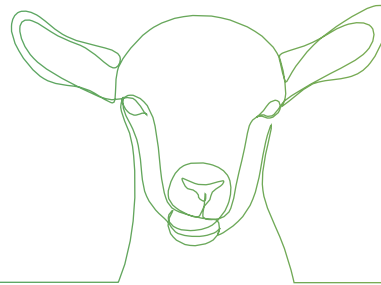
The main farm is certified organic with the Organic Growers Association (OGA). This certification program is tailored to smaller producers, as it has reduced fees and a streamlined application process suitable for small scale production systems when compared to some of the larger programs.

*“Being organic producers made it difficult to find properties to lease for our expanding operation. We wanted to grow our business, and there were properties available in our district for lease, but contracts required us to spread a certain amount of superphosphate every year. Real Estate agents managing the properties wouldn’t budge on this, so we were essentially shut out of the market”*

The two leased properties are in pre-certification, which essentially requires a quarantining period to ensure all chemical residues are out of the system prior to certification. During this time, no chemicals are used in any part of the production system.

*“It was only through partnering directly with family that we were able to increase our access to land.”*

# Operational Information



## Local Government Authority:

South Gippsland Shire

## Planning Controls:

Farming Zone (FZ); Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO, ESO2 & ESO5)

## Percentage of land utilized:

75 percent

## Percentage of land for biodiversity:

5 percent utilised.

When the property was first purchased 100 percent was used for pasture. Strategically planted native forest in areas that were difficult to farm for erosion management and wind breaks to increase pasture growth, extend growing season and reduce wind impacts on stock etc.

## Proportion of income:

100 percent of Colin's income. Sally works off farm to contribute.

## Pasture base:

15-20 species on the farm. No dominant species. Four different key grasses – rye, cocksfoot, phalaris & fescue. White clover dominates the legumes. It varies at different times of the year from dandelion to field daisy to plantain to burnet.

## Marketing approach:

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) promoted through social media, website, blog, newsletter.

## Volunteer use:

None. Used to take in volunteers from World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOFers) but of limited use. Some customers volunteer on the farm for greater involvement and connection to their food.

## Open to public:

Open to customers anytime and by appointment. CSA is opened annually.

## Farming framework:

Certified Organic ACO; Regenerative agriculture practitioner; Holistic; Grazing Management; Biodiversity conservation; Birth to dispatch management.

## Certification (eg. Organic):

Organic

## Transitioned (year):

2008

## Other products (household):

Leafy greens, passata, corn, potatoes.

# Question and Answer

**Q.** What benefits have you found in a regenerative approach to farming?

**A.** *Transition time was initially a period of going backwards. The previous owners didn't fertilise, but property did still flatline for a couple of years. We could have facilitated the transition with better knowledge of regenerative farming methodologies. Now the response and recovery rate is much greater than neighbouring properties. The property is more robust and more productive – definitely more resilient than when we got here, and the economic return is higher and healthier than when we got here.*

**Q.** What have been your biggest farming challenges?

**A.** *Time.*

*Weather – no Autumn break last year which hit hard in terms of standing feed on the farms.*

*Adapting to changing climatic conditions.*

*Barbers pole which caused losses of lambs and surviving lambs didn't make weight in time to sell.*

*CSA supported them through that but still recovering.*

*Marketing.*

**Q.** What has been your biggest farming achievement?

**A.** *The CSA transformed the business. It means that when times are tough, like with the Barber Pole issue, we are not alone. We have our community behind us.*

**Q.** What are the biggest industry challenges faced by yourself and other producers?

**A.** *Land. I worry about the combination of foreign ownership, urban encroachment and investment.*

*These factors drive land prices out of reach of most wannabe farmers. On our figures, it was \$1500*

*per acre to break even on loaning money but land in the area is averaging \$4500. It is so difficult to get into farming if not from a family that already owns land. This high cost of land is also directly connected to the farms getting bigger. It's those with the equity that can grow.*

*One modern industrial farm used to be farmed by ten families and these families are now lost to the community. Small farms create connection, vibrant communities. Cooperatives are now out of the question as there is no community anymore. No footy clubs, no schools, Post offices and shops closing down. This deterioration of community is directly related to get big or get out theory of farming. Government policy not helping this situation.*

**Q.** What have been your biggest business challenges?

**A.** *Growth. We are keen to grow our business but in a regenerative way that is conscious of both community and the environment. We have some exciting plans for the future.*

**Q.** What has been your biggest business achievement?

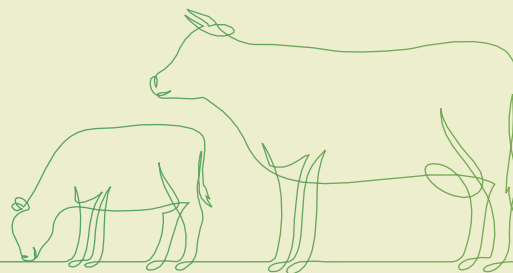
**A.** *Our loyal customer base and the CSA.*

**Q.** Who have been your mentors?

**A.** *Newman Turner really inspired me. He was strip grazing before anyone else. Great knowledge of plants and weed use. Author of four books. "Fertility pastures" is amazing.*

*Two local farmers and friends – they are business owners and provide insightful life experience.*





**Q.** What have been your most influential texts?

**A.** *Holistic Management Handbook*, Alan Savory.

*Agriculture* Rudolf Steiner.

*Call of the Reed Warbler* Dr Charles Massy.

**Q.** What action could local government take to support regenerative agriculture?

**A.** *Much is out of their hands as we are mostly state governed. We need to reconsider processing regulation. There should be more support for on-farm abattoirs. There is also disparity between State regulations, such as nitrate free salami being illegal to make in Victoria but can import and sell from NSW where it is legal to make. Raw milk sheep's cheese can be imported from France, but we cannot make it here. It's either food safe, or it's not.*

*Land use planning is something managed and implemented by local government and they could have an influence on supporting small farms in the landscape. They could advocate on behalf of the small farmer.*

**Q.** What action could state government take to support regenerative agriculture?

**A.** *The Artisanal production consultation and funding package was a great start, but only \$2M when greater investment required.*

*Turn around 40ha rule for homes on small acreage where genuine farming is proposed.*

*Allow salami without nitrates – everywhere else in the world can.*

*Allow on farm butcheries and abattoirs, mobile processing.*

*Facilitate rather than making it difficult. Small, productive farms create healthy rural towns.*

**Q.** What actions have you taken to increase your climate resilience?

**A.** *We have designed for drought and heat. 24,000 trees planted on the farm. This reduces soil drying through plantings slowing wind speeds and increasing shelter. Most paddocks have shelter belts and trees.*

*Buy green electricity and have plans to increase renewable energy on farm in the future.*

*Reducing plastics in our product packaging. All packaging is now home compostable.*

**Q.** Why do you do what you do?

**A.** *I always wanted to be a farmer. It gives us self-determination and autonomy. We are passionate about feeding people – making good, organic food available to normal families.*

**Q.** What are your plans for the future?

**A.** *We hope to grow through innovation and community. We have plans to make the farm more viable – more diversity, species and crops. We are keen to involve synergistic enterprises stacked on the farm.*



**City of  
Whittlesea**



[whittlesea.vic.gov.au/agriculture](http://whittlesea.vic.gov.au/agriculture)

## What is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)?

Community Supported Agriculture is a concept that originated in Japan in 1971. It was borne out of concern about industrial, chemical based agriculture and is closely aligned with the organic food movement of this time. The inspiration for and development of the first CSA projects is attributed to philosopher and President of the Cooperative Research Institute, Tekou Ichiraku, as well as the subsistence farmer, Yoshinori Kaneko. There are also close ties to the Japanese Organic Agriculture Association, which was founded in 1971, as well as the teachings of Masanobu Fukuoka, author of "One Straw Revolution". Since that time, the concept has spread throughout the world.

At its essence, a CSA project allows consumers to have a connection to the farm and landscape that produces their food. They commit to buying produce from the farm and, in that commitment, they share in both the risks of farming, as well as the abundance. It is commonly associated with vegetable box programs, but has been applied to a variety of products, such as meat, dairy, fish, etc.

The details of each CSA are unique to the farm at the heart of the program, but it is less about the trade of goods and more about the relationship between the farmer, the consumer and the landscape. CSA's can also include options to exchange work hours on the farm to reduce subscription cost, harvest festivals and celebrations, open days, volunteer days for tree plantings.

**CSA's are based on the Principles of Teikei:**

*"Building up of Producer-Consumer Co-Partnership in Organic Agriculture Movement"*

### Useful Links

<http://www.csanetworkausnz.org/community-supported-agriculture.html>  
<https://urgenci.net/csa-history/>  
<https://afsa.org.au/csa/>  
<http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm>

We would like to acknowledge that the information contained within this case study is the intellectual property of Colin and Sally's Organic Beef and Lamb.

### Contact details

**P** 9217 2081  
**E** [agribusiness@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:agribusiness@whittlesea.vic.gov.au)  
**W** [whittlesea.vic.gov.au/agriculture](http://whittlesea.vic.gov.au/agriculture)  
**Linked In** /city-of-whittlesea