

Farmers Market

SPEAKERS

Jeremy Melder, Sue Beckinsale

Jeremy Melder 00:00

Hello, my name is Jeremy Melder, and I'm the presenter from Beaming Green. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge that this podcast is being held on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people and paying our respects to elders both past, present and emerging. The Beaming Green podcast is a weekly podcast, which will help you to take out some of the stress and confusion about how to live your life more sustainably. And we do this by introducing people that have first hand experience and expertise in all aspects of sustainability. So you can get some amazing insight. You can implement the simple and practical solutions to enhance your life and the lives of your family. Anyone been to the Murwillumbah farmers market. It's located the Showgrounds in northern New South Wales. Now, if you have never been there, you will be in for a great surprise because it's beautifully surrounded by the Caldera, and Mount Wollumbin. This is a place where the community gathers to support our local farmers and artisans every Wednesday, from 7am till 11. It's a great place for the local economy, and cuts down on carbon emissions due to the travel of food to the marketplace. So today, I want to welcome Sue Beckinsale, who manages the Murwillumbah markets to tell us more about what goes on there. Sue, welcome to Beaming Green.

Sue Beckinsale 01:40

Thank you, Jeremy. I'm so happy to be here.

Jeremy Melder 01:43

It's really lovely to have you here. Sue, you are what I call the custodian looking after the farmers market in Murwillumbah. Can you give us a little bit of background as to when this started and so on?

Sue Beckinsale 02:01

That's a wonderful question, Jeremy, because we're about to celebrate 10 years,

Jeremy Melder 02:05

10 years.

Sue Beckinsale 02:07

So in April this year we celebrate the market actually, having been open to our customers for 10 years. And so the history of that is it came out of the caldera economic transition plan. There was a process that took a couple of years. And I think the plan was finally written in 2009. And one of the four key outcomes that they wanted to achieve was to establish a farmers market in Murwillumbah to support our local growers, and to help with the economics and social development of the area.

Jeremy Melder 02:41

Yeah, that's fantastic. Now, What part do you play in terms of organizing? This is are there any other people that assist you?

Sue Beckinsale 02:52

Ah, I managed market, which means really doing everything. Yeah. But the market is a not for profit. Yeah. So it came as the caldera farmers market. Murwillumbah Inc. Yeah. And so we have a committee, and the committee has a very important role. Because ultimately, they're responsible for the market. Yeah. But the manager is the one who ensures that the market happens every week. And anything to do with making sure that it happens every week, is what I do.

Jeremy Melder 03:26

So rain, hail, or shine, or even if you're ill, you still managed to, hopefully not when you're ill. But you know, especially with COVID-19 about,

Sue Beckinsale 03:36

I've been very lucky, I think in the, in the eight years that I've actually been managing the market. And its eight years for me coming up in June. I think I've only missed one. Yeah. Because some adverse occurrence in my life.

Jeremy Melder 03:51

I remember going early on, I think, in in when he first when it was first started. And you know, it's so wonderful to say how it has grown over the time and seeing all these lovely people with kids and music and you know, all these people just sitting around chatting in the sunshine when it's sunny. And just really, it's a community event, isn't it? Really, every Wednesday, people between seven and 11. In the morning, they're together to be with each other.

Sue Beckinsale 04:30

And you've absolutely hit the essence of the market. I see myself as simply the facilitator. Yeah, of an event that is about community, for the community with the community. Yeah. Without the community we wouldn't exist. And that community is wide and, embracing, yeah. So from the people who put the seeds in the ground or the seedlings in the ground to begin with, to people who have an idea about a business they'd like to create and think how do I do that the economics behind that can be quite daunting. But if they can start small and start at the market, yeah, then it's not so frightening. Yeah. So the market facilitates the development of, of small producers, as well as our growers. Yeah. And it facilitates the gathering of people every week. People will say to me, it's my happy day. Yeah, I come to the market. I, even people who work on Wednesday, I just they work schedule, where they can to be able to come to the market. And they say, because it's my happy morning. And in fact, one mum used to run into the market. And she'd say, quickly, I've got to pick up some things for the kids school lunches, but I'll be back later, she'd run in and she'd get what she needed the essentials to make an easy lunch, yeah, morning tea, whatever, for the children or breakfast. And then she'd come back and do the real shopping and catch up with friends. Yeah. So it really is a gathering point.

Jeremy Melder 05:59

Yeah, absolutely. Now in terms of like the criteria for people coming into the marketplace, I know there's a lot of organics and so on, is there some sort of way of evaluating who gets in and who doesn't get in?

Sue Beckinsale 06:15

Absolutely. And that's the beauty of having a market that's run by a committee and being a not for profit, we have a clear set of guidelines. For instance, any farmers that have applied to come into the market, they have to be able to demonstrate that they're growing what they sell. Yeah, and they have to agree to an independent order, before they start. So we have an independent auditor come and visit them and have a look at what they grow, and what they've applied to bring into the market. And they are responsible for accepting an audit annually or biannually, as determined by the committee to ensure that what they're selling is what they're growing. Yeah. And likewise, with our producers and others who come into the market, there is a process the committee considers every application. And that process evolves and changes, as the market has accepted and grown with more and more stallholders. our need for duplication is not there. Occasionally, we duplicate but it's a very finely nuanced growth factor of making sure that I mean our priority really is I suppose if a stallholder begins at the market, we want them to be successful. Yeah. So that's about making sure that we don't have too much overlap. Yeah, of course, with our projects, we have our wide variation between our farm stalls. And I think we've got that about right. They're all being successful. We can't just accept every farm stall who apply as much as we'd love to. Yeah, because we can only accept stalls at the rate of growth of our customers. Yeah.

Jeremy Melder 07:55

Do you have an idea as to how many people attend? on a Wednesday? I did, like have a rough estimate.

Sue Beckinsale 08:04

When I first came on to manage the market, eight years ago, I think we had about 450 on the first survey. Within a year or two, it increased to about 850. And I'd say we're well over 1000, probably 1500. Most weeks.

Jeremy Melder 08:19

Wow. The car park is always full.

Sue Beckinsale 08:23

Yes, it does. It fills up and we have those who come and hang around for most of the morning. Yeah, because of the music and the ambience of the market, which has been a very considered decision to create that, that place that center gathering point for people to come to, but some people pop in and go quite quickly. So there's a lot of traffic through the market, a lot of turnover vehicles and a lot of people coming and going Yeah, and that's wonderful. That's exactly what we want to see.

Jeremy Melder 08:51

Yeah. In terms of the vision, as you've got it, basically, it's determined on what what the size or the growth of the market is as to what you can put in there. Isn't that in terms of what else you can add to it

Sue Beckinsale 09:04

that and adding diversity? So when people approach me and say, I'd love to have a stall at the market, I say what are you bringing? You know, have you been around the market had a look is what you're offering something different to what we already have? Do you make it? Yeah, because you must be the maker, or you must work within the organization that makes the product that is being sold. And we are a farmers market. So we do put food as our absolute priority. And that's complemented with a few little other things that local makers make, but it is really all about the food. And our food producers are also asked to use the produce that our growers and farmers produce. Yeah, so that stallholders support one another. Yeah, if someone's making pesto to sell and they're not growing the basil or the coriander for the pesto, we ask that they buy that from the farm stalls. And that's very important. It's it's an organic, self supporting process and really important.

Jeremy Melder 10:01

So that then a community of people that are buying locally can know that they're actually supporting local, which is really important. Now, I want to just, we talked about this before offline, about the Griffith University survey that was done on it's a very small sample, just to tell our listeners that it is a small sample that was done. But it was very interesting. There's a graphic here that I'm looking at, that's basically showing, the reason why people actually go to a market is that they want to cut down on food miles, which is a really important thing. It's also supporting sustainable farming in the local area. And it's also reducing waste. And another important thing that we seem to have forgotten in the modern era is about seasonality. Because we can buy mangoes all year round if we wanted to bananas all around, but we've forgotten this whole thing of seasonality. Whereas going back a few generations that you could only get bananas in a particular season, or oranges in a particular season, or apples in a particular season, not every day. So it's kind of one of the things that was really that highlighted that to me also, the main thing that I thought was really highlighted here was the connection for the social, the social connection for the local community, which we've already talked about, and the entertainment, the activities are there. And it enhances community spirit, doesn't it?

Sue Beckinsale 11:33

It really does. It's a focus point. Early on, I remember seeing young mums with bubs come in. And it became a gathering and sometimes they didn't come to shop, they really came because it was a safe place to gather and talk. And then the babies grow into toddlers. And then the next baby appeared in the pram and we'd see the munching on a carrot or cucumber or an apple from the Apple Stall. And so we decided that it would be really lovely to have a gathering spot for families, young families. So we established what we call Kiddies corner. And one of the beautiful aspects that I love about our community is that sense of supporting and helping one another out. And so Paula LaBelle from the Family Center, and I work closely together to have that little family, young family, young kids gathering area at the market. And she actually organizes that, and organizes the volunteers and the activities for that area. And she's delighted because it gives her a way of connecting with young families, that's part of her role within the family center. So that sense of working with others, as I said, I just facilitate in

working with others to make this happen. And so that being a gathering point, we have people with computers who have meetings at the market. Tomorrow, I've got 30 volunteers coming from the Tweed Information Center to have a look at the market. And that's about them recognizing how important the market is for bringing people into the Tweed or being part of the whole Tweed experience when they're traveling into the area through the area. And I hear from people from all over the country who will ring and say is such and such a store still at the market. I used to just pass through Murwillumbah and now I stay a couple of nights in the area. Because then I plan my visit around coming to the market. So it's lovely to have that reach within the community and beyond the community. And we're also a place where families when they have visitors from other parts of the country can take their visitors. And in fact, a lot of the accommodation places from all along the coast, I have people from Eleonora down to Pottsville to or further up the coast who will bring their international visitors or the local visitors who are staying at their b&b to the market. Yeah. They say it's a destination. And so the market can be a starting point for their day in the Tweed, go to the art gallery, do whatever. Yeah. And seasonality is a really important part of that authenticity is important. And that doesn't mean that that's easy to manage. There are always challenges and there are always people who want to break the rules. Yeah. But what we say to our farmers, is really about educating our customers about the seasonality of produce. This study that the Griffith uni students did was really interesting. Then nutrition and dietitian students. And so we had two groups come through last year, one who looked one group looked at the seasonality of produce. And they did something that I'd been trying to work on for years and just didn't have time to have finished and I produced a seasonality chart for the year. So of course, it needs a little bit of tweaking, but only the other day, I was talking to one of the committee members and we thought about how we could display that to our customers, because it is an educative process, as you said, when we become so accustomed to seeing everything in the shops available all the time, it almost becomes a subliminal expectation. If you can't get it, what's wrong? or if we're really supporting our local growers, and eating seasonally, we have to learn that sometimes things that we love aren't available. But you know, there's a flip side to that Jeremy. And I say when I write my weekly newsletter for our customers sometimes, yay, avocados are back in and I've been so missing them. Yeah. And like avocados are just fading out now. Yeah. But they'll come back in around March, April, March, April on the coastal area, the ones from Burringbah, April, late April. So there's an excitement in the joy of seasonality and the eating with the seasons. And I think it's good for health.

Jeremy Melder 15:54

I totally agree with you. From a health perspective. I think there is a reason for that, right? why we've got these fruits in summer and some of them in winter. It's helps with our digestive cycles as well, I would say, and very important. Now, one of the things I wanted to find out about was you've mentioned a committee. Right, be nice to it. You know, there are obviously people in a committee that are helping you then are there who are those people that are on your committees that don't mind being mentioned,

Sue Beckinsale 16:24

the committee is comprised of always has a number of stallholders, and we have two community position. So we want the committee to represent the customer and the store holder, because the community votes on new applications and votes on or move, you know, moves various changes that we might want to see in the market. So right now, our president is Ian McCray have Nigel nuts. Yeah. Our vice president is Fabian Fabro from woollen Valley eggs. Okay. Our Treasurer is Jeremy, who brings

the kombucha? Yeah. Our secretary is Mal of Vietnamese Lotus. Okay. And so and Will Everest is what we call an ordinary member that ordinary no means described No, doesn't really describe at all he's not ordinary at all. And the value that he brings to the decisions made is really important. So that committee changes annually or can change annually. Yeah, there might be slight changes, or there might be changes. But yes, so that committee would meet maybe every four to six weeks. Yeah. And, you know, I report back to them, or if there's any things that I'd like them to consider or make decisions about or support, things that I'd like to do, like with our 10th birthday coming up, there are all sorts of ideas that I have. And at the moment, we're looking at calling out to the community to submit recipes, seasonal recipes for their favorite simple, quick and easy meal. Because what we're going to do for our 10th birthday is actually run some workshops at the market to show how to use our local produce to make quick easy meals, simple meals for families.

Jeremy Melder 18:13

What a great idea. And we were just discussing this before that, you know, we're running out of ideas for recipes, I am anyway, yay, I could always do with some great ideas. Now, one of the things Sue, during COVID, you know, we had quite a few more, we had to all shut down for six weeks. And I presume you were not able to operate in that time, or where you were at did while you were able to we did so I stayed at home. So because I'm vulnerable due to a poor immune system, so I didn't go anywhere.

Sue Beckinsale 18:44

Well, markets were considered long with supermarkets as an exception. Farmers markets, I should be quite clear on that. Not all markets. So farmers markets were definitely considered an exception. And that was such a busy time researching daily the changes and having new signage made every week. And we completely changed the layout of the market during that period. We made several changes. The first change was to move, move a lot of the farm stalls out at the pavilion.

Jeremy Melder 19:17

So that's what happened. Okay.

Sue Beckinsale 19:19

So that we can allow the social distancing for the all our customers queuing. Yeah. But then we found the queues were so long, we still didn't have room. Yeah. So we moved further out outside the area that the market normally inhabited. And that was done in consultation and with support from the Showground trust, and this is again, where community we have such a wonderful supportive community.

Jeremy Melder 19:43

Can't agree with you anymore. Yes.

Sue Beckinsale 19:44

Showground trust was just wonderful and I work with are so closely they're working with us right now, you know, a little bit late this morning because I had a phone call with them working on something that's about to be another change at the market. But yes, so they agreed that we could move our farm stalls

right out to allow for that extra space and the social distancing that was considered so important right through that anxious time in the early and middle days of COVID. Yeah. But you know, like most things in life, I think out of difficulties can emerge great things. Yeah. And really, it has been fabulous for the market, we didn't quite know what to expect. And we thought that maybe, and farmers have now I'm trying to say two things at once. So just take one strand at a time. Farmers plan three or six months in advance, so they have a planting ratio. And they have to plan for the seeds to the seedlings to the plant in the ground to the final harvesting. So they have a regime that of planting that's based on their expectations of what they're likely to sell. Yeah. And then COVID hits. Yeah, and coming from a farming background myself, my whole concern was, we can't have food rotting in the ground, like, keeping this market going is an absolute priority from two points of view. We need our farmers, our farmers at our farmers market, our small family farmers, yeah, they're not the big, massive farm growers that grow maybe only carrots on massive acreage, these are very diverse, Market Garden, small family farms, and most of them now we're intergenerational. So we've got the younger generation now growing, which is wonderful. So my absolute priority was to keep the farmers selling so we could keep our farms viable, and give the population give our wonderful loyal customer base access to that fresh produce more critical than ever. Possible health challenges. Yeah,

Jeremy Melder 21:53

these things shut down to such a large extent that, you know, we were very, very reliant on local produce, you know, and that's a great thing for us to think about more so from a, from a global perspective, from from an Australian perspective and say, Well, what can we do locally, to support our local communities and be more self sufficient. And, you know, that's why it's wonderful to have these, you know, we've got, you know, the Murwillumbah market, but he's also got, you know, the Mullum markets and the Byron markets, that that do support our local farmers. And that's really important, isn't it?

Sue Beckinsale 22:32

It's so important and Jeremy during this time, we worked the Northern Rivers markets, we all know one another. The managers, we had lots of telephone calls to one another checking on what we were each doing. And in the early days, right at the beginning of COVID, we actually got together and collaboratively decided on a small advertising campaign. Now we don't normally have the money to put into advertising. We are not for profit, we run out on a really lean. But by working with the others, were able to run a series of tv adverts, and so we do collaborate, we support one another. Yeah. And a lot of some of our farm stalls are at some of those other markets. So there is overlap. So that was important. But you know, people were very fearful in the early days and looking for a safe venue to shop. So we did remove our marquees, we removed our tables and chairs, because the focus then was to shop and go, yeah, yeah, we needed that turnover. So we had the space for people to queue. Yeah. We had the open air and we had the sunshine. Yeah, we had the healthiest environment. And you know, there are so many days on that Wednesday morning, when it looks as if it might shower, I just hold the clouds up, because I just want the market to have that sunshine. That's part of the happiness. Yeah. And unlike some of the other markets, I think I chose to keep the musicians because I recognized that while people were queuing, and the queues were much longer and it took much longer to go through and buy what you came for, the music was uplifting. So we really put the focus on having happy music, engaging music, and keeping people occupied in a really positive way. Yeah, yeah. But, you know, it

highlights the importance of local food. Yeah, food security, is something that is always in the back of my mind. And, and through various floods over the years. It's made me much more aware of how fragile that food security is. Yeah,

Jeremy Melder 24:35

absolutely. Yeah, you've very, you've raised a very important thing there that that is food security is so so important, isn't it? And our populations are growing, and we need to be able to sustain our local communities. Now there's a lot of people apparently speaking not speaking of floods, but a lot of people apparently moving to our region. And I was just at a meeting yesterday, which is called Murwillumbah Life. And they were talking about having a stall on the 24th of March. Is that right? to welcome our people that are new to Murwillumbah. And do you know, give them some loving, say, welcome to Murwillumbah and maybe share some information about Murwillumbah and, and the 2484 region, because it's a lot bigger than just Murwillumbah. And then just this will be like the first first introduction, but not everyone will be able to make it because it might be you know, as we're talking about working, and so on, they might not be able to pop in on that day, but we're gonna have a series of these in the future. And the first one is going to be on the 24th of March. at the farmers market.

Sue Beckinsale 25:57

Oh, that's lovely. Do you know, every week I meet up to the area? I get to know familiar faces. I don't remember everyone's name. I would love to Yeah, but I doubt it. But I remember faces. And, and yes, almost every week, I speak to at least one or two people who've moved into the area. So having a way of helping those people connect with other locals is so important. So that initiative is a wonderful idea. And at the market, we like to support our community organization. So we try to support them in a rotational basis. Yeah. And so we give community groups a free spot. Providing I know about it. And they agree to the guidelines that their given. And they have their insurance cover. Yeah. Yes, we like to give them a spot at the market. And we rotate that around so that people get to know what services there are in the area, or how to make connections, or where to find help if they need help with their finances, or family help, or just someone to talk to, or someone to know. Absolutely.

Jeremy Melder 27:06

And so just a little shout out is a very to people that are interested in wanting to know what's going on in Murwillumbah. There is a very new website called Murwillumbah.life. Yes, it's a funny name. But that's all it is. It's Murwillumbah dot life. And if you go in there, you'll see some of the events that are being listed in there. And also the farmers market have a Facebook page, don't they?

Sue Beckinsale 27:33

We have a website. Yep. And the Facebook page and Instagram page. On our website, we're encouraging more and more of our customers to sign up for the weekly newsletter. I do a lot of writing Mondays my writing day, I write and design a newsletter that goes live every Monday between one and three. And the customers are stallholders. Let me know that customers read there and come and say, Oh, I hear there's this or where do I find whatever they've just read about. And Jeremy, you might be interested, we include recipes in there.

Jeremy Melder 28:03

Fantastic. I'm gonna subscribe today.

Sue Beckinsale 28:06

So this week, for instance, we like to talk about what's new. Yeah, and there was a lot to talk about what's new this week, because we have three new season, things coming to market. We've got a new season royal gala, apples, and a new season quinces and a new season black mascot grapes. But we also have things that are grown and produced by some of our farmers that are less known about like Egyptian spinach, or Timor lettuce. So this week, we shine spotlight on both of those and included recipe that you can use Egyptian spinach in just to provide a catalyst for people to try something a little different.

Jeremy Melder 28:45

Yeah, that's really, that's fantastic. I will be definitely signing up. And I encourage all our listeners to also sign up. And also share info about what you love about the farmers market. You know, because that's kind of important feedback for the people that are, you know, volunteering their time, you know, because it takes a lot of time. And I know Sue, and the team put a lot of effort into doing this, and and share this, you know, share this information with people because we've got, I think around 10 or 15,000 people in this region that may or may not even know about the market, you know?

Sue Beckinsale 29:25

That's right. It's amazing. It still amazes me when I when people arrive and I say Oh, have you just moved into the area? Oh, no, I live down. There might mention a spot some way away, but they've just heard about the market and we think fabulous. Yeah. And you know, one person came because she's lost her job through COVID. Yeah, her job involved a lot of international travel and she now says I wouldn't miss it for the world. Yeah, you know, it's given her something when so much has been taken away so slowly, but we have people coming from Brisbane, there was one person who used to message me periodically, saying She comes down every week. Yeah, she loved the drive down. She loved the Murwillumbah area I mean,

Jeremy Melder 30:05

who who wouldn't want to who

Sue Beckinsale 30:06

wouldn't you drive into mall and borrow long cane road? That view? Yeah. is just so glorious. It is gorgeous. It's such a beautiful area. And there's such a lovely feel in the area. Yeah. So people come from all over the place all along the coast. And now that the borders the border barriers have gone. Yeah. And there's free movement again, between states. A lot of people who weren't able to come for a while, so pleased to be able to come back.

Jeremy Melder 30:33

Yeah, I think it's really, really great for people to participate in the farmers market. But also, there's lots of things that are beautiful art gallery here as well. So Sue, I really want to thank you for being on Beaming Green. And for our listeners, please, if you'd like this episode, please share with your friends or family. And hopefully we get you know, people really looking at sustainability in our local

communities, but also within our own lives. And this is what Beaming Green is all about is trying to enhance our lives. So thank you. So

Sue Beckinsale 31:11

thank you so much, Jeremy for having me. It's been lovely to be able to talk about the market, the market is my passion. I can tell we love hearing back from our customers too. And just another little one, if anyone would like to share a recipe on Facebook on Instagram, hand it to me at the market. For our 10th birthday, I'll be displaying those recipes at the market for other people to see and be inspired by and we're hoping to produce a calendar this year for next for 2022, which will have a selection of those recipes in it

Jeremy Melder 31:43

sounds wonderful. So until next time, see you and keep on Beaming Green. Thank you for being part of the Beaming Green podcast. The music for this podcast is produced by Dave Weir. Now we need more people to get on board and raise awareness about sustainability and climate change. And the more of us that are shining the light on these issues, the more government and business leaders will listen. We would love you to subscribe to our podcast, and share and engage in social media so that we can get some traction. Let's support one another and envision a bright future. Thanks for listening and see you next week.