

Fresh Market Value

OLGA DE MOELLER

Chefs queue up to buy food with a face

Quality produce at farmers' markets

Top chefs are leading the trend to market shopping.

Harvest's Clint Nolan buys his mache lettuce, chervil and purple heirloom carrots for his North Fremantle restaurant from Mt Claremont Farmers' Market every Saturday morning because he can't readily get them anywhere else.

Must chef Russell Blaikie and wife Tamara have been Mt Claremont regulars from the start, usually picking up bagels, fresh fetta, avocado and tomatoes for brunch at home while doing their grocery shopping for the family.

"I like the fact we can buy brilliantly fresh produce and speak to the person who grew it," Blaikie says. "That's important because you know where your food comes from and how it's been handled. It gives you a sense of the seasons; what's plentiful, what's coming in and what's going out, and that's always important when planning a menu. There's always something different, so I like to have a look around."

"One grower has heirloom carrots, so if they're in season I will put them on a special menu at the restaurant."

Come September, pizza whiz Theo Kalogeracos is a regular at Mondo's spring market, at the back of the butcher shop, to pick up his weekly treats. Rosa's honey, homegrown vegetables, fresh bread, croissants and a cup of good coffee are the drawcard here because it's food as he remembers it when he was growing up.

"Especially the lemons," he says. "They've got lumps and bumps, straight off someone's tree, and that's what I like."

Market shopping is about buying in season and prices do vary around Perth (see table).

"People don't come here because we're cheap; that's not the point," Mt Claremont Farmers' Market chairman Ron Gerritsen says. "We survey patrons every six months and, for three-quarters, freshness and quality is number one."

"Certainly that's the drawcard for a lot of local restaurateurs. You see them loading up their utes early in the morning with mainly lettuce and greens, but also some other things. We leave it up to the individual stallholders to set prices and allow some competition, but try not to have too many people selling the same thing, otherwise they'd go broke."

"In general, the pricing reflects the season, so if there's a glut, it comes down."

At the last count, there were 14 farmers' markets in WA. Jane Adams, from the Australian Farmers' Market Association, describes the phenomenon, which started in Victoria in 1999, as "more a habit than a trend", driven by people wanting to know where their food came from and taking a step to reduce the carbon footprint first hand.

"We're talking about the paddock-to-plate concept," she says. "It's food with a face and people will pay more at a farmers' market because they are after quality and want to support local growers. If they want heirloom tomatoes and they're available, they're prepared to pay; otherwise, when there's a glut of anything, prices come down."

Two of our markets — the original Wanneroo Markets in Wangara, and Fremantle Markets — are not strictly farmers' markets, with a mix of growers and retail stalls, but both have notably fresh produce.

Wanneroo Markets manager Sue Gavin reveals there are six big fruit and vegetable traders, with produce grown mostly in the Wanneroo region and drawing people from the northern suburbs. "It's seasonal, it's fresh, and a lot of restaurants buy from us," she says. "The biggest bargains are at end of trade on Sundays because stallholders will drop prices to sell whatever's left over."

South of the river, Fremantle Markets is being revamped, with marketing manager Ann Meyer



aiming to transform "The Yard" at the back to resemble Prahan Market in Melbourne. In the pipeline, a cooking school, an old-fashioned butcher and breakfast bar.

She estimates that fruit and vegetable stalls are 50 per cent grower direct, with the rest sourcing produce for weekly trade.

It all looked pretty good the day we visited and persimmons, at \$3.99 a kilo, would have to have been the top-value pick.

"We want to create a haven for people who think about what they consume and an atmosphere to enjoy shopping and eating," Ms Meyer says.

Lisa Harrap, executive officer at the Kalamunda Chamber of Commerce, says the Sunday Kalamunda Farmers' Market in the town's central mall has a big local following, with families meeting for a coffee and buying weekly produce.

"People come from all over WA to experience the fun, vibrant atmosphere and fresh, gourmet produce," she says.

Fresh: Clint Nolan stocks up at a local farmers' market.
Picture: Simon Santi

'We're talking about the paddock-to-plate concept. People will pay more at a farmers' market because they are after quality.'

JANE ADAMS

FARMERS' MARKET PRICE CHECK FOR MAY

	WANNEROO	FREMANTLE	KALAMUNDA	MT CLAREMONT
Cauliflower	\$1.30 each	\$3	\$3	\$3
Spring Onion	\$1.20 bunch	\$1.50	\$1.50	\$1.50
Pumpkin	\$1.20/kg (Japanese)	\$2/kg	\$2.50/kg	\$2.50/kg
Mandarins	\$2-\$2.50/kg	\$4.99/kg	from \$3.50/kg	\$3-\$5/kg
Apples	\$2.50/kg (golden delicious)	\$3.99/kg (Fuji)	from \$2/kg	\$4/kg (Fuji)
Cos Lettuce	\$1	\$1.99	\$1	\$1
Bread	\$3 (white Vienna or wholemeal)	\$6 (Abhi's organic spelt)	\$5 (organic)	\$6.50 (organic spelt)
Eggs (free range)	\$4/dozen	\$4.50	\$4.50	\$6
Honey (raw)	\$11.50/500g jar (Moore River jarrah)	\$7.90 (Ridley Bee bottlebrush)	\$7.50 (Colmena wandong or banksia squeeze pack)	\$11 (Darling Bee wandong or redgum)
Coffee	\$3.80 (regular)	\$3.50 (regular)	N/A	\$3.50 (small)
Food to Go	Mr Goz Gozleme \$8.50 (veg) or \$9.50 (meat)	"Raw" pizza slice, dehydrated wheat base with nut cheese \$7.70	Elmar's bratwurst in a bun \$6	Hot Dog with works \$4
Olive Oil	\$6.50/500ml (Carbonell)	\$10/litre (Matisse BYO bottle)	\$16/500ml or \$12.50 refill (Guinea Grove)	\$15/500ml (Perts Pantry)

Let the farmers' market come to you. A new online delivery service — eFarmersMarket — launched last month specialises in Australian artisan foods. It has 750 products to choose from, including sauces, pasta, relishes and chocolate, all made in small batches. Delivery is \$13. Visit www.efarmersmarket.com.au.

Adding to its WA range, home-delivery service Aussie Farmers Direct now has three breads from Glenn Marder's Little Home Bakery in Morley.

"We work on the old milkman concept by bringing everything to the door," says Aussie Farmers Direct spokeswoman Anna Thompson.

"We have 15 franchisees in WA and our produce boxes are full of seasonal fruit and veg sourced from farmers in WA. We've had pink lady apples from Manjimup, cherry tomatoes from Carabooda, potatoes from Pemberton, lemons from Gingin and limes from Denmark." A "couples" box is \$25 and a "family" box is \$35. Delivery is free. Visit www.aussiefarmers.com.au.

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