

# Farm

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Farm, pub, cafes and store – Kylie Balharrie has a handle on them all







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WORTH VALLEY PASTA FROZEN SPINACH





**Patchworker:** Kylie Balharrie among the vegetables at Harvest Farm and (opposite page) with produce destined for K&B, the provedore she runs with her husband, Michael Kennedy. Pictures: Zoe Phillips

# Harvest boon

Kylie Balharrie is just as comfortable working at the hotel, cafe or provedore she runs with her husband in Healesville as she is working on the farm that supplies all three. **Penny Harrison** reports

**T**HE AIR IN HEALESVILLE'S K&B store is fragrant with herbs. Glass cabinets are stocked with beautifully prepared cuts of meat, slices of charcuterie and chunks of artisan-made cheese, while shelves are laden with local delicacies and fresh produce.

Next door, at Harvest Cafe, regulars are tucking into handmade pies with K&B relish, a selection of gourmet salads and hearty soups, along with plenty of fine coffee.

Meanwhile, on the other side of K&Bs, chefs at the grand old Healesville Hotel are putting the finishing touches on a sumptuous weekly menu that champions the best of the season and the region. Together, the trio of businesses – nestled in the heart of Healesville's main street – has put the town on the map as one of Victoria's finest food destinations.

And behind them all is a booming farm that supplies vegetables, fruit, herbs and bush foods to chefs each day.

The pair behind the businesses and the farm is Kylie Balharrie and Michael Kennedy, who moved to the

area from bayside Melbourne more than 10 years ago. They started with the Healesville Hotel and, three years later, converted a drive-in bottleshop next door into the Harvest Cafe. Two years later came K&B (it stands for Kitchen and Butcher), a blend of butcher, delicatessen, greengrocer and bakery. Today, they also run the Sanctuary Harvest Cafe, at Healesville Sanctuary, and Museum Harvest Cafe, at the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum.

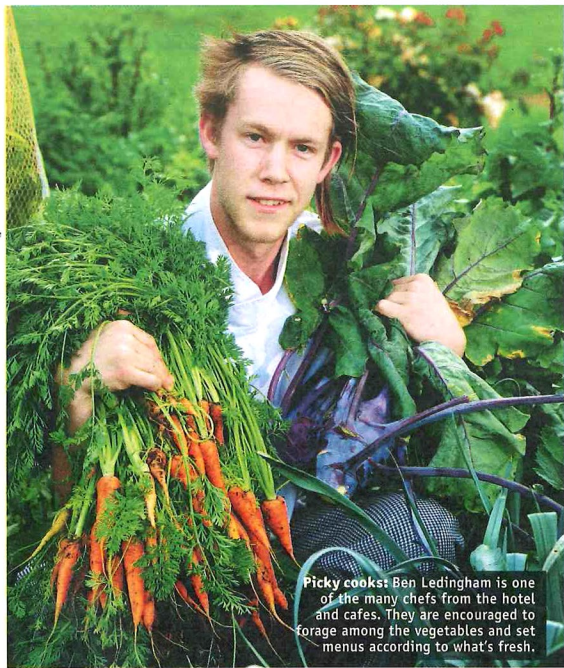
"From the start, we really wanted the focus to be on fresh, seasonal food and local produce," Kylie says. To show they meant business, the couple bought Harvest Farm, an eight-hectare property on the outskirts of town, and began planting a large kitchen garden and orchard, where chefs from the cafe and hotel could forage daily for produce.

"The kitchen garden has evolved over time," Kylie says. "It is a big focus of what we do with our chefs and menus."



**CONTINUED PAGE 14**





**Picky cooks:** Ben Ledingham is one of the many chefs from the hotel and cafes. They are encouraged to forage among the vegetables and set menus according to what's fresh.

#### FROM PAGE 13

The kitchen garden sprawls across a hectare and is brimming with herbs from rosemary and sage to thyme and tarragon, as well as a wonderful mix of bush foods and veggies. There is lemon tea-tree and Victorian pepper, along with heirloom tomatoes, borlotti and broad beans, artichokes, garlic, beetroot and salad greens such as chicory, sorrel and endives. "There's no point in growing things we can access locally here, so we focus on things that are a bit different," Kylie says.

The informal rambling orchard, planted around the family home, features olives, an array of citrus, peach, quince and snow apples.

"We encourage every chef to spend time in the garden and they work with us and our part-time gardener so everyone is aware of what's growing well and what's ready to be harvested," Kylie says.

#### Heading for the trees

Both Kylie and Michael have a strong background in restaurants and hospitality and have worked at The Prince and Stokehouse, in St Kilda.

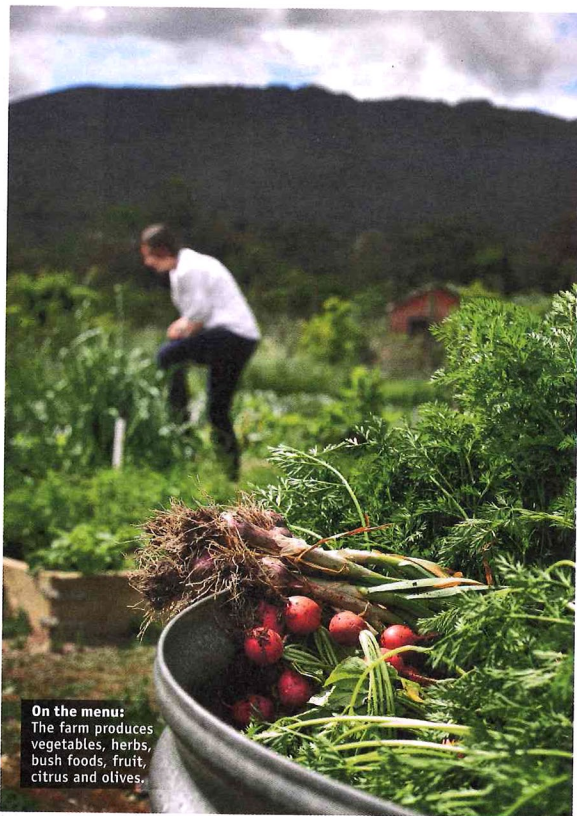
"Michael's background is mainly in wine and mine is in food, although

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neither of us are winemakers or chefs, or farmers," Kylie says with a laugh. "My dad was a farmer, though, and now works in rural real estate. My parents own a property out here, too, and Dad helps us out a lot. They also grow a few things for us, such as pumpkins, on their land."

The decision to move to Healesville was a big one for the city couple, but Kylie says they were keen for a change and had a toddler at the time the hotel came up for sale. But Kylie and Michael, who now have three children (Leo, Scarlett and Jack), have settled beautifully into the area and Kylie looks equally at home traipsing around



**On the menu:**  
The farm produces vegetables, herbs, bush foods, fruit, citrus and olives.



the farm in her gumboots as she does greeting regular customers and meeting with chefs at the cafe and hotel.

Kylie also arranges all the flowers at the hotel, using blooms (there are camellias, irises, roses and native shrubs) from the farm. And, as if they aren't busy enough, the couple runs two houses on the farm as bed-and-breakfast farm-stay accommodation.

"The kitchen garden plays a big role in that as well," Kylie says.

"Visitors can pick things from the garden for their dinner or collect eggs from the chooks for breakfast."

### From the ground up

The kitchen garden has been a huge learning curve for the pair but it is now an integral part of all of the businesses.

Nothing goes to waste in this enterprise and coffee grounds from the cafe and hotel are used as compost, while the farm's main egg supplier makes good use of the kitchen scraps.

**CONTINUED PAGE 16**

## Going bush

**I**N THE tranquil bush setting of Healesville Sanctuary, the Sanctuary Harvest Cafe is working wonders with native flavours.

Head chef Greg Hampton, who also teaches native foods at William Angliss Institute, is passionate across using different flavours from around the country to create new and exciting dishes.

Greg uses lemon tea-tree, finger limes and local Victorian pepper from the Harvest Farm garden, and even has his own patch at the sanctuary, where he grows native delicacies such as river mint, NSW Davidson plums,

dessert and blood limes, sea blight and a range of peppers.

"The flavours are like nothing else in the world; it's a unique experience to use them and develop something that's new," Greg says.

"I try to use them in dishes that people know, so it's not too confronting for customers. So our chicken schnitzel is a Wattleseed and coastal saltbush dukkah-crusted free-range chicken schnitzel. I also do a laksa with bunya nuts and lemon tea-tree. So these well-known dishes become something native and local, and completely different."



**Complementary forces:**  
Kylie and Michael with their Smithfield-cross, Ginger.





## FROM PAGE 15

Meanwhile, seedlings grow well in a rich, quality soil, which the gardener (employed at the farm one-and-a-half days a week) brings in from his home in Seville.

Kylie says the garden was initially planted in long rows in a paddock, which made it impossible to keep weeds out. “We didn’t want to spray and it was too much work to hand weed, so eventually we switched to raised beds and just kept expanding,” she says.

Other challenges have included pests and the drought, although Kylie says the farm was able to manage with rainwater tanks and a dam on the property. “We’ve had problems with ducks and cockatoos and the rabbits are a big problem, but we’ve started netting and have fenced the orchard and garden,” she says. “Still, there’s always something.”

### Reaping the benefits

Almost every day of the week you’ll spy one of the Harvest Cafe or Healesville Hotel chefs pottering about the Harvest Farm kitchen garden.

Kylie says menus change regularly to suit the season and whatever is ready to be harvested in the garden. Farm

## Farm facts

### HARVEST FARM

▲ Kylie Balharrie and Michael Kennedy grow vegetables, herbs, fruit and bush foods in a kitchen garden and orchard on their eight-hectare Healesville property.

▲ All produce from the farm is harvested for sale at the couple’s three Healesville businesses: K&B store, Harvest Cafe and Healesville Hotel.

▲ They also run the Museum Harvest Cafe, at the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, and the Sanctuary Harvest Cafe, at the Healesville Sanctuary, where chefs focus on bush foods.

▲ Chefs from the cafe and hotel pick produce from the farm for use in their seasonal menus.

▲ Excess produce is used in pickles, preserves or desserts.

▲ The farm employs a part-time gardener and all chefs are encouraged to spend time each week in the garden.

▲ [yarravalleyharvest.com.au](http://yarravalleyharvest.com.au)



**Paddock to people:**  
Customers at  
Harvest Cafe enjoy  
produce fresh from  
the farm.



produce is celebrated on the menus and you're likely to find such delights as rolled rabbit loin and prosciutto salad, Harvest Farm Jerusalem artichoke puree and honey mustard dressing, or wild barramundi, Harvest Farm borlotti bean ragout, swiss chard, preserved lemon and fennel, and Yellingbo yabbies.

In another ingenious business move, produce from the farm is also sold in the K&B store and often comes packaged with recipe ideas. "There are bags of salad mix, Jerusalem artichokes, garlic and heirloom tomatoes on sale in K&B," Kylie says. "We're also doing our own pickling and preserving."

An average of 20 wine boxes of

produce is transported from the farm to the main-street businesses each week. "Last year, we grew about three tonnes of heirloom pumpkins," Kylie says. "And the Meyer lemons were very productive. We had lemon cakes, tarts and curds. A lot of the fruit goes into desserts, jams and chutnies."

Kylie says the idea is to recognise what they can and can't do on the farm. "We're so lucky to live in an area with such amazing growers; it's great to be able to support them," she says. "Of course, we moved out here with the idea of a quiet country lifestyle. Now, we have about 60 to 70 employees. Still, it's a wonderful way of life." 