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News

Future Leaders of the Food Industry Get a Lesson in Avocados - 05/07/2010

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Last Tuesday Tom Silver welcomed the finalists of the 2010 Electrolux Appetite for Excellence (EAFE) competition to his avocado farm, Laurel Park, on the Alstonville Plateau.

The finalists, comprising of seven chefs, seven waiters and three of five young restaurateurs from around Australia, visited Laurel Park to learn about growing and handling practices, some of the issues growers face, and the good environmental credentials of conventionally grown avocados.

Tom's family started growing avocados on the Alstonville Plateau in 1987, after completing a degree in environmental science he stepped in to run the family business. Today, Laurel Park produces around approximately 60 tonnes of Hass avocados annually, with the fruit ultimately finding its way to the Melbourne and Brisbane central markets.

Tom applies an environmentally sustainable approach to farming at Laurel Park. This approach involves regenerating the rainforest along creek beds to boost biodiversity, using organic-based fertilisers, and implementing an integrated pest management approach to specifically target pests without requiring broad spectrum blanket spraying.

"It's hard work growing avocados, but it's a labour of love really" said Tom.

Tom's recommendation to food service professionals as well as consumers to ensure a better eating quality avocado; "You need to minimise the amount of handling, and the time between picking and consumption - the longer fruit is off the tree, the longer bruising and internal disorders have to develop". Tom also recommends purchasing the fruit through agents, providores and retailers that reliably supply a quality avocado.



Mr Tom Silver with EAFE finalists at his avocado farm, Laurel Park.

Tom grows the lesser known Australian variety, called Sharwil. The Sharwil avocado is prized by local foodies, and although the crop is too small to see these creamy avocados travel beyond the Northern Rivers, the EAFE finalists were lucky enough to try Tom's specialty; the 'Sharwil Avocado Milkshake'.

The visit, facilitated by Avocados Australia, was part of a prize package sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) and six other rural research and development corporations. The winners of the Electrolux Appetite for Excellence competition will be announced on Monday 9 August.

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Avocados Australia Limited is the Peak Industry Body in Australia for Avocados. We are a "not for profit" membership based organisation. Our members are Avocado growers along with associated businesses and industry people.

Avocados Australia seeks to work with all parts of the chain from production through to the consumer. By working together we seek to continually improve the ability of growers to provide a healthy, profitable and safe product for all consumers. As part of this continual improvement we guide a "research & development" and "marketing and promotion" program for the Australian Avocado industry.

The Australian Avocado industry comprises 1100 growers across the country and produces 49,500 tonnes of Avocados each year worth \$AUD180 million at farm gate and \$430 million at retail level. Key growing areas are North, Central and Southeast Queensland, Northern and Central New South Wales, the Sunraysia or Tristate area (South Australia, Victoria and South Western New South Wales) and Western Australia.

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