

Seasonal sensations

Craig Squires explores the benefits of supporting local producers

The recent flooding of Highway 1, closing the only major freight transport route into North Queensland, certainly highlighted the dependence we have on a range of fresh produce from outside our local region. Visiting the supermarket and even Rusty's during this period was very interesting for me, observing what was and was not available. It was amusing as well, particularly sending my son running down the aisle to grab the last can of tomatoes before anyone else could get to it.

There also was a fair amount of media comment to the negative about Rusty's and the supermarkets pertaining to the lack of local produce they stock. I would offer the comment that it is the wet season and many fresh vegetable items are not able to be grown this time of year in the tropics due to the intense heat and wet. It is called seasonality. This problem of availability also stems from a history of monoculture and export that was North Queensland. The variety of produce grown here has improved greatly in the past few years.

If we are to continue to improve the availability of food produced in this region the consumer needs to seriously support the local products when available, seek them out and demand them from retailers.

Ask where products come from, shop around and be prepared to buy seasonally, like in the old days when some vegetables simply were not available all year round. We have all become so accustomed to having everything available at all times that a system has built up over time that works against local producers selling locally.

We must demand better from the big supermarkets to support a resurgence in local produce. Unfortunately there is still minimal local loyalty. Take for example the recent demise of the Tableland pork industry that has gone virtually unreported. Perhaps before the big supermarkets abandoned this local product they could have labelled the product as "farmed in North Queensland".

>> Craig Squire is the chef and director of Ochre Restaurant and Catering. View his recipes at www.ochrerestaurant.com.au/recipe.html



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Tablelands potato and rocket salad, grilled Gallo silk, balsamic and olive oil

SERVES 4 AS AN ENTREE
GLUTEN FREE AND VEGETARIAN

INGREDIENTS

400g potatoes
200g Gallo silk cheese – similar to haloumi cheese
100g rocket
1 red onion – sliced
Sundried tomatoes, olives and roast capsicum to taste
Balsamic vinegar and olive oil to dress
Cracked black pepper – from Aussie Pepper at Silkwood
Fresh basil to garnish
Sea salt

METHOD

Wash and slice potatoes, season and toss with olive oil and salt, grill at moderate heat on barbecue. Assemble with salad ingredients as shown. Slice and grill silk cheese, place on salad and dress.

LOCAL SUPPLIERS

Gallo cheeses are available at IGA stores, The Edge, Rusty's Markets, Kuranda Fresh and Gallo Dairyland.



Pan roast red emperor fillet, Asian greens and kaffir lime buerre blanc

SERVES 4 GLUTEN FREE

INGREDIENTS

4 x 200g pieces of red emperor or similar local fish (ask for a small amount of fish trim for the sauce)
Selected Asian and green vegetables in season, such as bok choy, Chinese cabbage, sugar snaps, beans and bean sprouts
Prepare vegetables, wash and cut into even sizes
Sesame oil and soya sauce

BEURRE BLANC

(easy home version)
100ml white wine
100ml water
Half an onion - chopped
6 kaffir lime leaves (retain 2)
100g fish trim
50g sugar
Pinch of black pepper and sea salt
Sauce: Simmer the above for 15 minutes. Add 200ml pouring cream. Bring to simmer, thicken lightly with potato starch*. Add 100g cube cold, unsalted

butter. Remove from heat and stir butter through sauce. Strain in another pot, add two finely sliced kaffir lime leaves. Stand aside.

METHOD

Heat oven to 180C. Place red emperor fillets in small oven tray, brush with butter and bake 10 minutes.
Bring large pot of water to boil – lightly salt water and plunge in green vegetables. Remove quickly retaining crispness and place in bowl – add shoots, splash with soya sauce and sesame oil.
Assemble fish and vegetables on plates and sauce. Garnish with fresh herbs such as thai basil or coriander.

*Potato starch – mix a dessert spoon with a little water, pour into sauce while simmering and stir through rapidly, allow to cook through for one minute, be careful not to over-thicken.



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