

Tassie Pepper features strongly at "Growing the Growers" Field Day

On the 8th March, Australian Native Foods & Botanicals (ANFAB) and Tamar NRM partnered to bring together growers, aspiring growers, chefs, wholesalers, retailers and boutique producers to showcase exciting developments and possibilities of the burgeoning native food and botanicals' sector as well as exploring niche markets. The day included a farm visit to Bronzewing Farm (Native Mountain Pepper producer) in the morning then speakers at Tailrace Centre in the afternoon.

The event focussed on growing and marketing of Australian native edibles and medicinals, research, cultivation, product to plate and export as well as cultural issues with an indigenous perspective presented by Kris Schaffer. The event was part of a national roadshow supported by the Australian Government-based Farming Together program and Tamar NRM's federally funded Backyards to Broadacres Program (NLP Sustainable Farming Small Grants).

Native Mountain Pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) grows from sea level to mountain tops in Tasmania and presents a new cropping option for those wanting to get into native foods and botanicals production. While south eastern Australia has the plant occurring naturally as well, Tasmania is "pepper-central" and demand is outstripping supply.

Speakers included Dr Chris Read of Diemen Pepper, who has worked for many years in the areas of essential oils and floriculture, as researcher, technical adviser and practitioner. He currently operates a mixed horticultural enterprise on his coastal property near Hobart.



Above: Andrew Rath explains his propagation techniques at Bronzewing Native Mountain Pepper Farm

Tasmanian bushfoods expert and horticulturalist Kris Shaffer of Five Kungkas talked about cultural significance and respectful harvesting while Dr Finbarr Hogan (UTS terrestrial ecologist) spoke about sustainable farming. ANFAB director, Marianne Stewart, covered off on the domestic and export market opportunities and the role of ANFAB as the peak national industry body representing the interests of people and businesses involved in the native food and botanicals industry – traditional and new indigenous plant products.

York Town based distiller, Philip Ridyard, from Strait Brands is also championing indigenous Tassie ingredients, including sloe berries and hazelnuts in their vodkas and gins. The company produces Native Mountain Peppery Vodka and an award-winning "Straits Brand" Dry Gin made from an organic lemon infusion, as well as the world's only hazelnut gin.

The visit to Andrew Rath's Bronzewing Farm at Underwood, was a clear highlight. This farm has produced Native Mountain Pepper since February 2011 and aims for an expected yield of dried Tasmanian DEVIL Mountain Peppercorns® of 2000 kg/year. They plan to have 5,000 native pepper trees in production producing 10 tons of raw berry product by 2021.

The 35 attendees all had an interest in native food production. Some had already commenced businesses in Tasmania and needed to know more about commercial production or sensitive wild harvest of produce. Yolla farmer and fledgling pepper producer Prue Reddish said "I really need to get that industry input on how to pick quickly and how to make sure I get the best quality product. So that's why I'm here today, to see how they do it".

You can hear the ABC Radio coverage featuring speakers Dr. Andrew Rath, Dr. Chris Read, Kris Schaffer, Marianne Stewart, Greg Lundstrom and a number of attendees at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/tas-country-hour/mountain-pepper/9543356>