



**SOUTHERN FORESTS FOOD COUNCIL INC.**

*est. 2012*



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**10 YEARS OF GENUINELY SOUTHERN FORESTS**

November 2023

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# OVERVIEW

## ABOUT

The Southern Forests Food Council (SFFC) was established in 2012 to represent the interests of local producers and agri-tourism operators and to foster the Southern Forests' status as one of the nation's premium food bowls and culinary tourism regions.

The Southern Forests region produces over 50 different types of fruits and vegetables, truffles and gourmet products, dairy, sheep, pork and cattle farms, as well as award-winning wines, ciders and beverages, and exceptional culinary experiences. The region is heavily invested in agriculture, with over \$230 million of agricultural production coming from the area each year.



**THE SFFC UNITES DIVERSE PRODUCERS AND AGRI-TOURISM OPERATORS, AIMING TO ESTABLISH THE SOUTHERN FORESTS AS A GLOBALLY RECOGNISED AGRICULTURAL AND CULINARY TOURISM HUB WHILE FOSTERING REGIONAL PRIDE AND SUSTAINABLE JOB CREATION.**



## A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

The Southern Forests Food Council (SFFC) is proud to be celebrating its ten-year milestone. Over the past decade, the SFFC has worked alongside our producers and stakeholders to promote the diverse range of premium produce that is grown and produced in the Southern Forests region of Western Australia.

The SFFC and our supporters have been instrumental in developing key aspects of the region's food and beverage industry, supporting local farmers and food producers, and fostering strong partnerships with wholesalers, retailers, chefs, and government agencies.

We invite you to look back on the last ten years and share in our pride at the achievements we have made and our excitement for the future of the Southern Forests food industry with its ever evolving and adaptable nature.

Kieran Kinsella  
Southern Forests Food Council, Chair



# COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

The SFFC is overseen by a Committee of Management made up of local producers and skills-based appointments. Between them, the Committee have hundreds of years of farming and business experience.

The Committee oversees the strategic direction and activities of the organisation, and have been the driving force behind much of the success of the SFFC.

The inaugural Committee of Management was appointed in 2012, and each year sees a rotation of local producers and skills-based members be appointed to the role.

The SFFC would like to acknowledge and thank the founding Committee of Management in Vic Peos, Nicole Giblett, Brian Thornley, Arthur Hawke, Gavin Booth, Katie Masters, Kathy Dawson, and Bevan Eatts.

## WITH EXTENDED THANKS TO THE CURRENT AND FORMER COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT MEMBERS.

### CURRENT

Kieran Kinsella – Chair  
Monica Radomiljac – Vice Chair  
Ben Arnold – Treasurer  
Bevan Eatts – Secretary  
Corrie Scheepers  
Mark Bending

### FORMER

Al Blakers  
Alana Starkie  
Alex Wilson  
Alexis Gandy  
Andrew Temptra  
Brad Ipsen  
Carlo Pessotto  
Charlie Roberts  
Dean Baker  
Doug Savage  
Ed Valom

Jake Ryan  
Jane Duinmeyer  
Jessica Phillips  
John Kilrain  
John Lucey  
Kim Edwards  
Luke Soussa  
Mitchell East  
Neil Miles  
Nial Twigger  
Nicole Giblett

Nicole Rose  
Nikki Griffiths  
Simon Green  
Tina Thomas  
Tony Fontanini  
Tori Marver  
Vic Peos  
Vick Grozotis  
Victoria Howe  
Wayne Franceschi

## OUR VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The vision of the Food Council is to:

- Build the region's reputation for quality food.

The objectives of the Food Council are:

- Grow the value of agriculture and food production, create careers, and encourage growth of local populations.
- Establish and maintain unifying regional brand(s).
- Strive to achieve price premiums for produce from the region.
- Achieve consumer recognition of the region as a desirable culinary and tourism destination and an ethical producer of quality food.
- Sustain the effort through ongoing viability of the Food Council.





# PROJECT TIMELINE

YEAR	KEY ACTIVITIES
2010	Idea for a food council was formed among local producers.
2012	Southern Forests Food Council established as an association and received \$5 million funding through Royalties of Regions as part of the Shire of Manjimup's Agricultural Expansion Project.
2013	Genuinely Southern Forests brand developed and launched to the local community, then launched into WA's gourmet food scene at Margaret River Gourmet Escape and Manjimup Cherry Harmony Festival, SFFC office opening.
2014	Genuinely Southern Forests branded cartons developed in partnership with Box Co. Forrest Highway billboard promotion, FRESH liftout in The West Australian, Food of the Southern Forests cookbook launch, commence annual collaboration and promotion of local food events, trade stall at Food Hotel Asia Singapore, export market development trips to China, Hong Kong and Singapore, new crop development partnership for gold kiwifruit.
2015	Southern Forests Food Pty Ltd established for produce trading, Genuinely Southern Forests brand changed to black and white, Genuinely Southern Forests apple and avocado stickers developed, branded beef trials including staff qualifications, export market development trips to China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, facilitated export with Oh Deli and Benelux, new crop development trip to New Zealand.
2016	Genuinely Southern Forests market floor partnership with Allstates Farms, export trials with Greendotdot in Hong Kong, export market development trips to China, Hong Kong, Singapore, grower trip to New Zealand, Genuinely Western Australia brand developed for export.
2017	Inaugural annual Retail Marketing Campaign launched, Genuinely Extraordinary Southern Forests Food & Farm Tours launched, Food Agility CRC and Curtin University research partnership with On Farm Water Demand project, won national Economic Development Award.
2018	SFFC received an additional \$1 million funding through the State Government's Royalties for Regions program, membership fee introduced, Eastern States market floor partnerships commenced with All Aussie Farmers and Preferred Fruit, WA wholesale partnerships commenced with Fresh Express, getFresh Merchants, Mercer Mooney, branded pre-pack produce trials, Hong Kong export market development trip, WA showcase at Parliament House Canberra.
2019	Inaugural Chef Tour in collaboration with Buy West Eat Best and getFresh Merchants, gourmet hampers launched, Buy West Eat Best Good Choice retail collaboration.
2020	Regional boundary expanded to include Bridgetown, Greenbushes and Nannup, COVID-19 disruption, branded produce box trials with Fruit Hub, collaboration with Southern Forests & Valley's Tourism Association.
2021	State Government funding concluded, relocated to new office with support from Shire of Manjimup, inaugural WA's Great Graze, Meet the Buyer tradeshow.
2022	Food and Art Tour partnership with Southern Forest Arts, SFFC appointed as SW WA Drought Hub Node Lead, SFFC 10 year milestone, branded display at Perth Royal Show in collaboration with Shire of Manjimup, Meet the Buyer tradeshow.
2023	WA's Great Graze, Genuinely Southern Forests brand's 10th birthday, 10 year Member and Stakeholder Survey undertaken, State Government announced new funding contribution of \$725,000 for SFFC.

# ESTABLISHMENT

## FROM A GRASSROOTS VISION TO A \$5 MILLION PROJECT: HOW THE SOUTHERN FORESTS FOOD COUNCIL PUT WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S PREMIUM FOOD BOWL ON THE MAP.

The idea to create a unified agricultural body first emerged from a conversation amongst local farmers and soon grew to a group of founding members who all shared a vision to rightfully put the Southern Forests on the map as the premium food bowl of Western Australia.

The idea was taken to the Shire of Manjup CEO and was rapidly shaped up into a \$5m Royalties for Regions project to be funded as part of the Shire of Manjup's Agricultural Expansion Project.

Formalities were observed with an Interim Committee being appointed in July 2012 to oversee the establishment phase of the organisation and the Southern Forests Food Council Inc. was formally incorporated on 24 September 2012.

The inaugural Committee of Management was appointed in November 2012, and with the inaugural Executive Officer and Project Coordinator in place the SFFC and its Committee began in earnest developing a regional brand, and all that came to follow.

## THE SFFC HAS ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS THE PEAK INDUSTRY BODY FOR THE REGION, REPRESENTING LOCAL PRODUCERS SPANNING HORTICULTURE, AGRICULTURE, AQUACULTURE, VITICULTURE, AND AGRI-TOURISM.

### MEMBER-BASED ORGANISATION

The SFFC is a member-based organisation which at its peak grew to over 400 hundred members. Following the introduction of an annual membership fee in 2018, many family and business memberships consolidated and member priorities sharpened with the SFFC currently supporting 100 producer members and agri-businesses throughout the region.

The SFFC and Genuinely Southern Forests brand represents producers and agri-businesses who live and operate in the Southern Forests region. In 2020, the brand's regional boundaries were expanded to embrace the neighbouring regions of Bridgetown, Greenbushes, and Nannup.

The SFFC undertook a Member Value Survey in 2023 with resounding support amongst members and key stakeholders for the SFFC and brand to continue its efforts.

# BRAND DEVELOPMENT

**GENUINELY SOUTHERN FORESTS REPRESENTS THE PRODUCE, PRODUCERS AND AGRI-FOOD OFFERINGS OF THE SOUTHERN FORESTS REGION, AND AFTER TEN YEARS OF PROMOTION IS NOW WELL ESTABLISHED AND RECOGNISED BY 52% OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CONSUMERS.**

In late 2012, the SFFC appointed three of Perth's leading creative agencies in Meerkats, braincells, and Place Match, to join forces to develop and undertake an in-depth brand and marketing development plan to create and implement a regional brand.

The emerging brand was shaped and moulded over many months, before launching on 8 November 2013 to a crowd of over 200 local producers, businesses, stakeholders, and government agencies.



The brand continued to evolve and in 2015, following feedback from growers and produce buyers, the brand changed from red and cream to black and white, to improve produce presentation and impact. In 2016, the Genuinely Western Australia brand variation was launched to support Southern Forests produce into export markets, and in 2020 the brand's regional boundary was expanded to embrace the neighbouring regions of Bridgetown, Greenbushes, and Nannup.

**GENUINE**

*fresh local produce*

— FROM —

**GENUINE**

*down-to-earth locals*

The Genuinely Southern Forests brand and its variations have been trademarked in Australia and overseas to protect the IP of local producers who utilise the brand and operate under the SFFC Brand Code of Practice.

Brand awareness is measured annually through independent market research surveys, with one in two consumers now recognising the brand.





# MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

**A DIVERSE RANGE OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES HAS ELEVATED AWARENESS OF THE REGION AND THE BRAND BY 30% SINCE 2015.**

## QUALITY CONTENT

None of this would have been possible without the incredible photography and videography assets created to capture the expansive range of seasonal produce, the passionate producers who grow it, and the region that supports it all. The SFFC partnered with many talented WA creatives, particularly Craig Kinder Food Photography, to create its extensive library of stunning produce, producer, and agricultural and landscape images.



Following the official unveiling of the Genuinely Southern Forests brand to the local community on 8 November 2013, the brand was launched into Western Australia's gourmet food scene at the 2013 Margaret River Gourmet Escape. The SFFC, along with a dozen producers and local chefs, created a fantastic showcase of all things Genuinely Southern Forests.

The SFFC continues to promote and market the Genuinely Southern Forests brand, produce, and region utilising the strategy and expertise instilled by the creative agencies, as well as an extensive range of marketing material such as website, television, radio, print, billboards, busbacks, social media, articles, features, and liftouts.

The SFFC invested over \$2.5m in marketing and promotions over the past ten years which has resulted in significant growth in awareness for the brand and region.

Food events continue to provide great promotional opportunities for the brand, the produce, and the region, with the SFFC supporting many of the local annual food events such as Manjimup Cherry Harmony Festival, Truffle Kerfuffle, Warren District Agricultural Show, Unearthed Pemberton, and Pinot Picnic, as well as, Perth Royal Show, WA Signature Dish, WA Good Food Guide Awards, and the establishment of WA's Great Graze a state-wide celebration of our food and beverage producers.



# RETAIL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

**A CRITICAL PART OF PROMOTING THE REGION AND PRODUCE IS WORKING WITH RETAILERS TO INFORM AND EDUCATE CONSUMERS ON THE FANTASTIC QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE PRODUCE FROM THE SOUTHERN FORESTS REGION.**



The SFFC are pleased to have worked with over 50 retailers including some of Perth's leading independent greengrocers in promoting the Genuinely Southern Forests brand, seasonal fresh produce and the unique Western Australian region. Together ensuring customers get the opportunity to experience the exceptional taste and goodness of the Southern Forests.

The Retail Marketing Campaigns commenced in 2017, with in-store point of sale displays and built up to \$100,000 worth of marketing and advertising over a nine month period, with buy in from retailers. Consumers had different touch points with the brand including, radio, television, bus backs, in-store tastings, recipe cards, events and competitions.

**PARTNERING WITH SOME OF PERTH'S LEADING INFLUENCERS ADDS EXTRA FLAIR, FLAVOUR, AND REACH TO THE CAMPAIGNS.**

A special mention for the fantastic team at Gilbert's Fresh Market who have been involved every year of the campaigns, demonstrating their commitment to the region's producers and sharing their passion for fresh local produce with their customers.

# AGRI-TOURISM

**GENUINELY EXTRAORDINARY SOUTHERN FORESTS FOOD & FARM TOURS LAUNCHED IN SEPTEMBER 2017 AND HAS SINCE SEEN THE SFFC COORDINATE AND HOST HUNDREDS OF VISITORS ON OVER 50 TOURS.**

The SFFC were long looked to as a driver for agri-tourism in the region, however it wasn't until 2017 that the SFFC took a formal leap into the space and developed the Genuinely Extraordinary Southern Forests Food & Farm Experience, coordinated food and farm tours providing visitors with the unique opportunity to visit farms and agri-businesses that were not typically open to the public.

The food and farm tours were trialled in various formats, from structured monthly tours to customisable small group tours, to tours supporting local events such as the Manjimup Cherry Harmony Festival and Truffle Kerfuffle, industry focused tours such as chef tours, school groups, special interest groups, trade delegations, and even a creative partnership to develop food and art tours.

***Genuinely***  
**EXTRAORDINARY**  
 Southern Forests Food & Farm Experience

**THE GENUINELY EXTRAORDINARY SOUTHERN FORESTS FOOD & FARM TOURS SUPPORT OVER 50 LOCAL BUSINESSES.**



The SFFC's efforts in this space has provided the confidence for various local producers and agri-businesses to expand their farming operation to include an agri-tourism component and create a unique opportunity for producers to connect directly with consumers and visitors.

Agri-tourism continues to be part of the SFFC's core activities in 2023, with regular agri-tours for international visitors, school groups, special interest groups, and local partnerships such as events continuing to provide opportunities for visitors to explore the incredible food, farm, and arts offerings of the region.



# PACKAGING

**TO SUPPORT GENUINELY SOUTHERN FORESTS BRANDED PRODUCE INTO MARKET, THE SFFC DEVELOPED A RANGE OF PACKAGING, FROM PRODUCE STICKERS AND PRODUCE CARTONS, TO BAGS, PUNNETS, LABELS, BOXES, AND MORE.**

The SFFC has explored and trialled a range of packaging options with members and stakeholders throughout the years, with some products having a simple solution to apply the brand, such as apple stickers, whilst others such as broccoli presented more of a challenge. Innovative options such as laser branding, eco-packaging, and unique point-of-sale packaging have been explored, with price points, logistics, and scale often meaning the new and interesting were not always viable.

Change in consumer and market acceptance also impacted the use of some packaging solutions, such as the Genuinely Southern Forests grab and go bags. Customised to suit a range of produce, this plastic packaging was supported into market by producers, wholesalers, and retailers until the shift away from plastic packaging. The SFFC and the brand has had to adapt to such changes and continues to work with its producers to identify packaging solutions for fresh produce.



**GENUINELY SOUTHERN FORESTS BRANDED PACKAGING HAS MADE AN IMPACT, WITH OVER 20 MILLION APPLE AND AVOCADO STICKERS AND MORE THAN 100,000 GENUINELY SOUTHERN FORESTS CARTONS LEAVING THE REGION EACH YEAR.**



Such a wide variety of produce required an adaptation in aesthetic and design, with the branding swapping colour scheme from red and cream to black and white in 2015. The change instantly made the produce 'pop' and the impact of the black and white cartons on the wholesale markets was regularly acknowledged by agents, buyers, retailers, and producers.

Co-branding allows the SFFC to work with producers who have an established brand and leverage both brands assets and appeal. Co-branding has been undertaken for both fresh produce and value-added and gourmet products, with the Genuinely Southern Forests brand now represented on over a hundred products from the region.

# DOMESTIC SUPPLY CHAIN

**IDENTIFYING, EXPLORING, CREATING, AND CONNECTING SUPPLY OPPORTUNITIES HAS BEEN A FOCUS FOR THE SFFC SINCE INCEPTION.**

In late 2014 the SFFC established a trading arm in Southern Forests Food Pty Ltd to allow the SFFC to seek out, connect, consolidate, and supply Genuinely Southern Forests produce to various markets. The SFF Pty Ltd facilitated produce to FIFO mine sites, various retail outlets in Perth and regional WA, as well as regular air freight consignments to Hong Kong.



**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EXTENSIVE SUPPLY CHAIN NETWORKS BY THE SFFC HAS ALLOWED LOCAL PRODUCERS TO EXPLORE, TRIAL, AND ENGAGE IN VARIOUS MARKETS AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT ON THEIR OWN THEY MAY NOT HAVE HAD ACCESS TO.**

Direct supply opportunities have always appealed to producers ideally resulting in a better return for their produce. The SFF Pty Ltd explored, trialled, and facilitated such opportunities however the majority of producers still work with the traditional wholesale market system.

The SFFC therefore sought out opportunities to better engage and promote the region's produce under the Genuinely Southern Forests brand, with the launch of a Genuinely Southern Forests market floor in partnership with Allstates Farms in 2016.

The arrangement wasn't sustained, but the door to further engagement with other market floors was opened and new relationships created to facilitate connections and supply with local producers, as well as opportunities for the SFFC to trial Genuinely Southern Forests products such as pre-pack apples, avocados, feijoas and more.

Changes to the Incorporated Associations Act meant the SFF Pty Ltd entity was no longer needed, so it was dissolved in 2018 and the SFFC was able to proceed with the role and established new supply chain partnerships with both Perth agents and key markets in Sydney and Melbourne.





# INTERNATIONAL SUPPLY CHAIN

**EXPORT MARKET DEVELOPMENT WAS IDENTIFIED EARLY ON AS A KEY OPPORTUNITY FOR PRODUCTION GROWTH FOR THE REGION. THE SFFC INVESTED SIGNIFICANT TIME AND RESOURCES INTO EXPORT MARKET OPPORTUNITIES.**

Following the launch of the Genuinely Southern Forests brand into the WA market, the SFFC took the brand and a dozen producers to Singapore for one of the leading fresh produce trade shows in South-East Asia. The SFFC initially facilitated introductions between exporters and producers, but soon saw that further involvement and support was required to convert enquiries to sales.



## FRUITS TO ASIA

The SFFC undertook almost a dozen export market development trips between 2014-2018 seeking out new contacts and markets, strengthening existing relationships, and promoting the region and its produce.

These efforts resulted in various supply opportunities for members, including regular consignments to Greendotdot in Hong Kong.



Export success was predominantly found in niche quality focused markets, where the region's premium produce was its selling point, rather than the bulk commodity market which found WA product to rarely be viable due to seasonality, productions costs, timeframes, and price.

The global pandemic in 2020 essentially halted export, however as the world recovers export markets are beginning to open again, with strong opportunity for products such as avocados beginning to rebuild.





# INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

**AGRICULTURE IS THE REGION'S MAJOR INDUSTRY WHICH HAS GROWN FROM \$127 MILLION IN 2012 TO \$237 MILLION IN 2022.**

The SFFC has explored and trialled various industry development initiatives including collective models for insurance and packaging, product trials for Genuinely Southern Forests branded beef, apples, and potatoes, and service sponsorships such as ag-tech and industrial relations services.

## NEW CROPS FOR THE SOUTHERN FORESTS

New crops were explored, with grower trips and industry representative visits resulting in large numbers of feijoas being planted in the region, as well as producers investing in plantings of a licensed gold kiwifruit variety. Other crops and industry development opportunities investigated were gourmet spices, Asian vegetables, licensed apple varieties, native foods, fresh produce boxes, gourmet hampers, as well as collaborative processing facilities for the region. The SFFC developed the funding proposal which resulted in the establishment of the Premium Food Centre at the Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development Manjimup facility, and inspired the Food Innovation Precinct in Peel.



The SFFC built up a strong reputation for governance and professionalism and in 2020 began working with local groups including the Wine Industry Southern Forests, Manjimup Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as Curtin University, to provide secretariat and project coordination services.

In 2022 the SFFC was appointed the South West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub Regional Node Lead for the Manjimup Zone. The SFFC's strong horticulture network allows the SFFC to provide guidance on priority issues impacting the drought and climate resilience of the local farming systems and broader industry.

# KEY LEARNINGS

The SFFC is often asked what is behind its success, and the honest response comes down to the people involved. From the founding group of passionate producers to our many members and stakeholders, to the Ministers for Agriculture and their agencies, the Shire of Manjimup, investors and partners along the way, as well as our dedicated staff and the local community. The SFFC is a project that relies on the people involved to maintain its momentum, purpose, and value.

A special mention of Vic Peos, Nicole Giblett, Bevan Eatts, and Laura Bolitho for their founding involvement and decade of dedication, passion, and support for the initiative.

Unifying a region as diverse as the Southern Forests has had its challenges, from the diversity of produce to the scale and size of operations to the understanding and stage of individual marketing journeys. The SFFC has attempted to work with many of our producers and members to create value and benefit for their own businesses whilst also ensuring a unified regional approach and outcomes.

The SFFC is fortunate to sustain strong and meaningful relationships with the State Government, Shire of Manjimup, its members, sponsors, supply partners, consumers, and key stakeholders who have all contributed, supported, and advocated for the cause over the past decade.

**AS WE LOOK BACK ON THE LAST 10 YEARS, WE ARE PROUD OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS WE HAVE MADE AND ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SOUTHERN FORESTS FOOD INDUSTRY WITH ITS EVER EVOLVING AND ADAPTABLE NATURE.**

## LOOKING FORWARD

The SFFC is looking forward to another decade of success, to trial, explore, invest, and deliver on a range of projects and outcomes for the local industry. The generous and ongoing investment from the State Government and the Shire of Manjimup demonstrates their commitment to the industry and the local producers and provides the means for the SFFC to continue to deliver outcomes of value.

With a focus on collaborative projects that will bring together various aspects of the industry and supply chain, environmental and ethical compliance, driving awareness and demand for Genuinely Southern Forests produce and region, and opportunities to enable and enhance the local producers and industry.

We are genuinely excited about what the future may hold for the Genuinely Southern Forests brand, our local producers, the region, and broader industry and we look forward to working with you to find out.







## CONTACT

Southern Forests Food Council Inc.

1 Johnston Crescent, Manjimup

Western Australia 6258

[info@southernforestsfood.com](mailto:info@southernforestsfood.com)

+61 (0)8 9772 4180

[www.southernforestsfood.com](http://www.southernforestsfood.com)



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