

Bargara Berries experience

By Angela Norval

For Michael and Debbie, Bargara Berries has never been just about growing strawberries.

It started with a love of farming, a love of good food, and a belief that people really enjoy knowing where their food comes from.

Over time, that simple idea has grown into something much bigger: a place where visitors can slow down, reconnect with each other, enjoy beautiful local produce and experience a real working farm.

That is the magic of agritourism.

Debbie said when people arrive at Bargara Berries Meadowvale, they don't simply buy a punnet of strawberries.

"They walk onto a farm and they see where the strawberries are grown, pick their own fruit and taste the difference that comes from eating berries that have been grown, ripened and enjoyed right here," she said.

"For children, it can be the first time they have picked food directly from a plant.

"For parents and grandparents, it is an opportunity to step away from the rush of everyday life and spend time together.

"For everyone, there is something wonderfully satisfying about taking home strawberries they have picked themselves."

The experience doesn't stop in the strawberry patch.

At the Strawberry Kiss Cafe, the farm continues onto the plate.

Visitors can choose how they want to enjoy their time on the farm.

Families can settle around tables and chairs beneath the gazebos, enjoying the shade and the relaxed country atmosphere.

Others spread out a picnic blanket on the lawn, creating their own little space to relax while the children explore and everyone enjoys the surroundings.

Fresh pancakes, handcrafted gelato, hot cof-



Debbie Meiers and Michael Meiers of Bargara Berries continue to welcome visitors to the region with the support of Bundaberg Tourism. (Supplied: Paul Beutel)

fee, and more than 25 varieties of jams made in-house turn the visit into something people remember long after they have driven home.

The gazebos provide a comfortable place for families and groups to sit together, while the lawn and picnic areas give visitors the freedom to create a more casual outdoor experience.

Debbie said it was that choice which was an important part of what makes the cafe special.

"Visitors aren't simply coming in for a meal and leaving, instead they are encouraged to stay, relax and enjoy the farm.

"That is what makes agritourism so special.

"It brings together farming, food and people.

"The strawberries grown on the farm can become the star of a pancake breakfast, a scoop of gelato or a jar of jam.

"What begins in the paddock can end up as a family memory around a table beneath a gazebo or sitting together on a picnic blanket on the lawn and sometimes, that is what people are really looking for when they travel.

"Not another attraction to tick off a list, but somewhere they can relax, eat something delicious and feel connected to the place they are visiting."

When asked why Bundaberg, both Debbie and Michael agreed the Bundaberg region was an extraordinary place to build an agritourism business.

"Our rich agricultural history, fertile soils and climate provide the foundations for growing exceptional produce, but what makes the region particularly special is the people.

"There is a strong sense of community among farmers, producers, tourism operators and local businesses.

"Everyone has something different to offer, and together those experiences create a much bigger story for visitors.

"A traveller might come to Bundaberg for the beaches, the turtles, the reef or the region's famous produce, but they can discover that there is so much more to explore.

"Farm gates, local food, country experiences and coastal adventures all fit together.

"That encourages visitors to stay longer, explore further and discover the personality of the region rather than simply passing through."

For a small family business like Bargara Berries, being part of a regional tourism community as a business member of Bundaberg Tourism makes a real difference.

Bundaberg Tourism helps put local businesses on the map and gives visitors a reason to discover experiences they may never have found on their own.

Through regional marketing, events, digital promotion and partnerships, businesses like Bargara Berries can reach people who are looking for something different.

It also creates an opportunity for the region to tell one story together.

Instead of saying, "Come and see our farm," the message becomes, "Come and experience Bundaberg."

That is powerful.

A visitor can spend the morning picking strawberries, enjoy pancakes and gelato at the Straw-

berry Kiss Cafe, relax under a gazebo or on a picnic blanket, discover local produce, visit another attraction in the afternoon and perhaps finish the day by the coast.

Every business benefits when visitors stay longer and discover more of what the region has to offer.

For Michael and Debbie, the greatest reward isn't simply seeing people buy strawberries.

It is seeing families return.

It is watching children proudly carry a basket of strawberries they have picked themselves.

It is hearing someone say they remember visiting the farm years ago.

It is seeing grandparents bring their grandchildren because they want to share the experience with another generation.

And it is watching visitors sit together beneath the gazebos, enjoying pancakes and gelato, or stretch out on a picnic blanket on the lawn while the farm carries on around them.

Those moments are what make all the hard work worthwhile.

"Farming is not always easy.

"Agritourism certainly isn't easy either.

"There are early mornings, unpredictable weather, growing seasons, busy weekends and all the work that happens behind the scenes that visitors never see.

"But there is something incredibly rewarding about opening the farm gates and inviting people in."

Bargara Berries has become more than a place to buy strawberries.

It has become a place to experience them and that is why the agritourism model works so well.

It is authentic. It is local. It is delicious.

Most importantly, it gives people a reason to slow down and enjoy a little piece of the Bundaberg region.

For Michael and Debbie, that is the story they are proud to share.



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