

Wild Women of Food

WORDS by Sharon Timms

Who shapes what you eat?

When you think of women and food, there's a nurturing yet driving force that's present within the food industry, one that is steeped in history, and almost always stemming from the mothers and grandmothers in childhood kitchens.

Food is more than just restaurants and kitchens – it's the marketplace, the producers, farmers and the teachers. Here in Tropical North Queensland, women with a deep and diverse set of skills matched with a hungry passion for business are making their mark on the region. The future of food is here, and it's decidedly female. Meet a few of the best here in the north, treading their own delicious paths.



ANGE CONSTABLE
THE HORTICULTURALIST

EAT SHOOTS & LEAVES

The perpetual summer of the tropical north feels like a million miles away from the wintery wonder of Invercargill in New Zealand's South Island, where Ange Constable began her primary producer career.

"I grew adult vegetables for about five years, selling to markets and restaurants. I'd pick my produce and just go walking down the street with baskets into restaurants – the chefs loved it! All organic produce, different to what was found in bulk producer orders."

Tired of the cold, Ange shortly moved to the tropical north, settling on a property in the beautiful Mowbray Valley. "Here in the tropics, micro greens are absolutely perfect. The warm climate means things grow fast and there's a quick harvest time for produce. Seed to plate takes a week. I love growing interesting things that the chefs love and no one else has, like buckwheat and mungbean shoots. Local restaurants such as Salsa Bar & Grill and The Junction in Mossman are big supporters of the grow local philosophy and have always embraced me.

"In addition to growing for restaurants, I've started preparing seed kits, available at the markets on a Saturday, as well as supplying our subscriber list. I'll let subscribers know what's available via a text message menu in conjunction with [other local producer] Wild About Spice. Initially, this subscription order was just for friends in Mowbray, but then it leaked out and now there's about 60 people on the list each week."

"The future is to build a new state of the art greenhouse, so I go into more community-based projects, teaching people how to grow their own food and how to set up a small-grow operation like mine.

Watch this space!"

[instagram.com/eatshootsanleaves](https://www.instagram.com/eatshootsanleaves)



JENNA RUMNEY
THE TREATMAKER

DAINTREE ICE CREAM Co & TROPICAL FRUIT FARM

Jenna Rumney never intended to make ice cream in the middle of the rainforest. In fact, being a marine biologist, having a business in the rainforest wasn't really on the cards at all. With her partner, Dave, being a rainforest tour guide, there was always a lot of banter over reef and rainforest in the household, until one day they saw an opportunity to take over the well-established Daintree Ice Cream Co & Tropical Fruit Farm.

"Dave would stop past the Daintree Ice Cream farm as part of his daily tour, and then discovered it was for sale. Tracy, the original owner, decided to sell. We went up to see the property and being there with the fresh air, the green-on-green-on-green and the roaming wildlife, we knew it was special."

There have been plenty of changes at the farm since Jenna and Dave took over, whilst keeping within the original structure of the business – the signature 4-cup taster of ice creams made from rare and exotic tropical fruits. "We're not about the same old chocolate and vanilla, even though we will be doing that soon because we're GROWING chocolate and vanilla. Our philosophy revolves around 'tree to cup' so you can follow the journey of the fruit around the self guided orchard walk, seeing, smelling and feeling the fruits while tasting them in homemade ice cream."

The farm houses over twenty species of exotic fruit from South East Asia, South America and Pacific Islands. "Each varietal is fascinating in their own right", Jenna says. "I love experimenting with the fruit, in cooking, and studying all the health properties that each have. Being a scientist, it's certainly very interesting.

"Every recipe is also individual – the ice cream is built around the fruit rather than the other way around. Ice cream ingredients and consistency are based on the fruit sugar content, texture and flavour, so that at any time, it's the fruit profile that remains the superstar.

"One of the best things is that we get to perpetuate happiness. People are on holiday in one of the most beautiful places in the world, then they get to taste ice cream that they'd never have tasted before."

[daintreeicecream.com.au](https://www.daintreeicecream.com.au)



Daintree Ice Cream Company



PENNY WILTSHIRE
THE FERMENTER

KEFIR QUEEN

What better example of using food as medicine than by aiding health with the most basic of cooking essentials: vegetables, water, salt and spices? This is the mission driving The Kefir Queen, aka Penny Wiltshire, who creates her own line of nutrient dense, healing ferments. With interesting textures and flavours that are excellent for health, Penny is on a mission, one gut at a time.

"I'd been married for 10 years and we got into that habit where business took over our lives. We had an event company, three children and I was running a bed and breakfast – our life was just busy. It was good, but after 10 years, we realised it was just a business relationship.

"My neighbour told me about a fermenting workshop. I thought I'd give it a go, which then sparked an interest. I started making a few things at home – kefir, sauerkraut, and basically just having fun. I then decided I was going to go raw vegan. It was around the time we were separating, and I found that the raw vegan diet created such a clarity in my mind. I felt like I had my own path and that I would be totally okay on my own. It gave me strength, so rather than feeling lost with no purpose, I really turned inwards and followed my own instincts. All I ever wanted was to be healthy and happy, and this felt like the right thing to do."

"After fermenting for a little while at home, I had some friends who had some digestion issues, so I started making them kombucha and sauerkraut. They eventually wouldn't take it without paying, and before I knew it I was making some nice coin on the side just from friends. I thought, if I'm making that much from one cabbage, maybe I should buy ten!

My first market stall I had 15 jars of sauerkraut and 15 bottles of kefir and it all sold out. The next week I made double which also sold out, and I twigged that there might be a business opportunity here...

"Now, I concentrate on developing new ferments, and teaching small workshops so people can create their own. My knowledge comes from a place of experience and passion, and I like to share that."

kefirqueen.com.au



PAT GILBERT, JILL THOROUGHGOOD, DAPHNE TIMMS
THE COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

QUEENSLAND COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (QCWA)

The QCWA is synonymous with scones, jams and Country Show competitions. Although these are important markers for this Australia-wide group, it would be churlish to think these ladies are just about cups of tea - the group is a powerful force for community support. Far from being 'a Friday afternoon cake stall', goods produced by the Port Douglas QCWA are used by local producers, cafes and restaurants, such as artisan bakers Duke's Doughnuts.

"As a group, we're actually known as the Chicks With Attitude (CWA)," says Jill Thoroughgood, Vice President of the Port Douglas branch. "We are much more than ladies who bake and bitch. We're fundraisers and community custodians."

"The Friday Afternoon Cake Sale started as once a month. Now, as it's so popular, we're on once a week and we also sell salads and frozen meals. Most of the people who come here are from outside the club – office workers, tourists. Everything is locally sourced or grown. For example, in summer we make mango jams, mango chutneys, relish and cakes. I've got rosellas at my place, so we use them to make jams; Jan's got Lillypilly and Davidson Plum", say Pat Gilbert, Branch President.

"We do more than just food, of course. Fabric shopping bags, blankets for OzCare Old People's Home, beanies and gloves to distribute to the homeless down south, breast care cushions for Pink In The Tropics, cloaks for the Ambulance Bears, and we work closely with the RSL in providing catering for returned soldiers."

Champions for local produce, members do their bit for promoting tourism in the region. "Visitors take the small jars home as gifts or for themselves," says Daphne Timms, one of the weekly cooks. "The ladies here, as well as being big promoters for our tropical produce, are just bloody good at sales! You wouldn't be game to walk out of here with empty hands after our ladies have chatted to you."

qcwa.org.au