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HARTDALE PARK RED DEER FARM

David and Rose Laird of Hartdale Park Red Deer Farm at Maffra were recognized recently as the winners of the 2007 Bendigo Bank Gippsland Business Awards – Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries category.



*David and Rose Laird receiving Award
2007 Bendigo Bank Gippsland Business Awards
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries category*

The couple started farming deer on their property five-and-a-half years ago with 10 hinds and a stag and aimed to increase their herd size to produce quality velvet antler from their line of Warnham and Woburn Stud stock and to turn off surplus animals for venison. However, with the drop in both venison and velvet antler prices, combined with the continued drought, David and Rose were forced to re-evaluate their farming practices and business plan 18 months ago.

“We actually put the farm on the market, but then decided there was no way we were going to go back to living in town. We observed the growing trend in Farmers’ Markets and realized this presented us with the opportunity to value add to our product and supply our venison to a local domestic market. We started selling venison at Farmers’ Markets 18 months ago and have now increased our turnover by 500%”, said David. “We are continuing to run Warnham velvet stags but we have now introduced wapiti bulls into the herd as terminal sires. We now have about 70 breeding females and 55 velvet stags as well as young stock coming through. We have culled very heavily on temperament and performance over the last 18 months, which has quietened the whole herd down considerably, as well as increasing weaning percentages and velvet weights.”

To ensure maximum tenderness and effective quality control, they only use stock that is in prime condition from either their own farm or from other deer farms in the Gippsland region. They oversee the entire processing chain by delivering the animals to the abattoir, assist in the processing and packaging and then deliver the venison to their customers. “By undertaking most of the work ourselves we can also keep our costs down and pass on these savings to our customers,” said Rose. “This also allows us to be competitive with beef and lamb.”

“At each of the Farmers’ Markets that we attend, we stock a complete range of fresh and frozen products, in a variety of portioned packages. We have developed a unique range of sausages and burgers that are very low in fat and gluten free. We also offer sample tastings of these products and, most importantly, we provide nutritional information with every purchase.”

David and Rose have both recently given up their ‘day-jobs’ to concentrate more on running the farm and developing the venison business. They are also in the planning stage of building their own boning room. Rose said “Deer farming also offers us a great lifestyle and it is a really great place to bring up the boys. When you consider how many people told us we were mad to take up deer farming, that we would be broke in a couple of years – this award does make us proud. We do work very hard, and only get about four weekends off a year, but we just love what we do!”