

## **Willunga Farmers Market AGM 2021**

### **CHAIR REPORT**

This has been another interesting year. We thought last year was difficult. This one proved to be equally challenging.

I'm going to commence this report with a reminder of the objectives of the Willunga Farmers Market under our Constitution. This is an exercise the board has undertaken continuously as it has grappled with the decisions it has had to take to ensure the sustainable operation of the market during a pandemic.

Are objectives are:

- to ensure the successful and continued development of the Willunga Farmers Market
- to support by the means of the market, the production and sale of fresh local seasonal produce of the Fleurieu Region
- to promote wherever possible the practice of sustainable food production on the Fleurieu Peninsula

Our goal has been to operate our market as an essential service for the benefit of our 70 odd small businesses stall holders and our shoppers under the rules dictated by our COVID plan as approved by the South Australian Police operating under a major emergency declaration. Some of the rules around the wearing of mask etc have changed over the period but the rules around safe distancing of at least 1.5 metres have not.

So on behalf of the board and our members I offer huge thanks to Jenni and Richard for their very hard work this year to ensuring we keep the market operational and in line with our objectives and the COVID regulations. They have been very ably and cheerfully supported by Linda and the casual weekend Saturday morning team, Heather who has taken over Richard's role from time to time so he can have a break and, also Ben, Solomon and Geri. The operation of the market over two sites for the bulk of this year has been a challenge for all.

To the stall holders thank you for your flexibility and co-operation as we have had to re-invent the market layout almost weekly.

The shoppers have also had to show perseverance with the ever-changing locations of their favourite stalls. All of us are enormously grateful for your continued support.

Last year I thanked all the volunteers (affectionally known as the 'high vis' mob!) who had stepped up week after week to ensure we met the requirements of the COVID plan we had in place as required by the government under the major emergency declaration. That

situation has not changed, we are still operating under a COVID plan which is regularly policed and thank goodness the volunteer effort has not abated. We could not have operated the market without this support. I think Jen will give us some figures on this in her report. The whole market community is very grateful to all of you.

Through it all life and trade has gone on. We have lost a few stalls and we have gained new ones.

We have said goodbye to:

Village Greens, Heirloom Harvest (now morphed into Dancing Waters Farm), Falkai Farm and Kondropolis

And we have welcomed:

Naranga Orchards, Dancing Waters Farm, Choice Mushrooms, Little Forest (last year's scholarship winners), Never Never Distilling, Ginny Pig, Willunga Gelato, Sunny Bunch, Hen's in the Meadow, Peninsula Providore, Romley Estate, Canoe Tree Wines, Petal and Green and Shifty Lizard (returned).

What is evident from this list is that we have increased the number of value-add traders. Most of these businesses trade at the market on a fortnightly or monthly basis thereby providing us with additional variety and interest without upsetting the 70% fresh produce and 30% value-add produce balance we strive to maintain.

I am pleased to report that we continue to have the support of the Landscape Board in offering our **scholarship**. The recipients of our 7<sup>th</sup> Scholarship Dirk and Marnie Pritchard from Breaburn Farm are due to commence trading with their Ducks, Guinea Fowl and Quail in November . We will hear more about them later in the meeting. The announcement about the details for the next scholarship will be made towards the end of the year.

Due to the COVID regulations we have not held many **events** this year but have squeezed a few in where we could. We had a low-key 19<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in February and held the Wilmark awards at "Our Place @ Willunga" in November. We have also had a few small events for the stall holders and the volunteers including a thank you breakfast hosted by The Farm Willunga which was very generous of them.

We intend to hold the Wilmark awards again this year unless directed otherwise by the powers that be but we have not yet decided on the format or the dinner venue. We will advise the members through the usual communication channels when we have.

To the Board, also a group of stalwart volunteers, thank you for the time you have committed this year, thank you for cheerfully contributing at long board meetings and for grappling with some difficult decisions.

## THE MARKET SITE

Finally I want to provide some information regarding the challenges and decisions about the siting of the market over the past year.

At the commencement of the pandemic in early 2020 we made the decision to operate the market over two sites, The Town Square and Rec Park.

With a couple of exceptions we operated in that fashion until late July this year. Due to activities at Rec Park we were required to move the market on a few occasions. We are very grateful to Rec Park for accommodating us during the pandemic but as time has gone on and Rec Park have been able to reintroduce their sporting activities and the Quarry and Greenlight Markets have been able to resume trade we have been required to regularly change our location on the site and as a consequence our layout. On one occasion we were not able to trade on the site at all hence our temporary move to the Willunga High School site for two weeks in May. Due to the following challenges we had at the Rec Park site the Board made a decision at its June meeting that in the interest of stability, sustainability and staff sanity we needed to find a way to operate from one site.

The challenges of operating over the two sites were:

- Continual change due to the Rec Park needs for the site and the low priority of the needs of the Willunga Farmers Market. Our efforts to negotiate a more permanent stable arrangement on that site did not meet with approval.
- The traffic hazard created by the road between the two sites – we witnessed many near accidents between cars and pedestrians over the period
- The cost of leasing the two sites
- Wear and tear on the staff and volunteers managing double the market area
- Staff time consumed by the demands of the continually changing site instead of working on other aspects of the market's operations e.g. auditing of farms and production areas, attraction of new traders, maintenance of stall holder and customer relations , communications and marketing etc etc.

The Board decided that its preference was to return to the Town Square site if possible. It was agreed and we would run a trial for the month of August as it is a quiet month from both a stall and a shopper perspective so a good opportunity to see if we could meet the COVID plan requirements at the one site.

As we know there was then an outbreak of COVID on the eastern seaboard and as a result a heightened nervousness on the part of the SA transition committee. That, together with feedback from stall holders and shoppers about their anxiety regarding a return to the small Town Square site which they felt would not allow for the desirable level of distancing between stalls and shoppers, prompted the board to again review the best location to site the market to allow it to operate in a sustainable way and afford confidence to both the stall holders and the shoppers.

The final piece in the puzzle was the updated COVID plan from the SA police for the Town Square site which limited the numbers at the site at any one time to 180 people. We know from our head counts over previous years that at any one time we will have 150 to 500 people in the market depending on the time of year and the time of day. It was therefore clear that we would not be able to meet the government's requirements. And furthermore due to the porous nature of the boundaries of the site we would not be able to control the numbers of people entering the site. And of course it would not have been sustainable for the market or the stall holders to hold a market for those numbers.

For those reasons the board made the reluctant decision to take up the generous offer from Willunga High School to use their grounds to site the market. It was decided that in order to give stability to all the stakeholders, staff, stallholders and shoppers in a period of ongoing uncertainty around the COVID rules we would make the move for one year with the decision to be reviewed in February 2022.

As a consequence we have been operating from that site for several weeks now.

As many of you are aware this move has been met with a mixed response.

I would like to assure members that the board has explored and will continue to explore alternative sites in Willunga and ways of expanding the Town Square site to give us a bit more elbow room. We have previously communicated by the Producers Press email and a flyer at the info desk the steps we have taken in this regard. Copies are available at this meeting for anyone interested in that information. At this stage we have renewed the Council lease for the Town Square and with support of the Council are further investigating the possibility of closing off a section of St Peters Terrace to allow us to expand across the road and onto the Library carpark.

To conclude, the board will continue to make decisions in the best interest of the market and therefore for the 70 or so businesses that depend on the market for their financial viability. It has been our job to keep the market operational during the pandemic and we will continue to do so.

We welcome all the feedback we are receiving as we deal with the teething problems of yet another new site but the best thing for all of us to do is to continue to attend the market as shoppers and traders in support our farmers and producers.