

Samphire next big thing?

By GAIL THOMAS

ANDREW French and Gabrielle Bakey of Snowy River Station have captured a niche market producing marsh samphire that is keenly sought by discerning chefs and food lovers.

This succulent plant which resembles miniature asparagus and has a crisp and crunchy texture is also known as sea asparagus or glasswort as the plant's ashes were used to make glass and soap. The pair have taken to purchasing rundown cattle properties and farms, with the goal of restoring them to property production levels through traditional means.

"We try to work with the land and with nature, using old and proven ways," Andrew said.

"Most of these old methods got pushed aside when everything became get big or get out with farming some 30 years ago.

"We like to go back through our past and revise and Gabrielle and I also own another farm up at Port Stephens, NSW – the Bulga Creek Bush Camp."

All up, Snowy River Station runs about 905 hectares at the river mouth and about 866ha in the high country.

"We had some partially salt damaged country and were testing methods of rehabilitation in different plots," he said.

"It was during my research for this that I found out samphire was edible. It was a crop that suited this particular country so we gave it a try as we had plenty of saltwater to irrigate with.

"The test plots began in 2007 as we began to develop cultivation methods with our first sales in 2008.

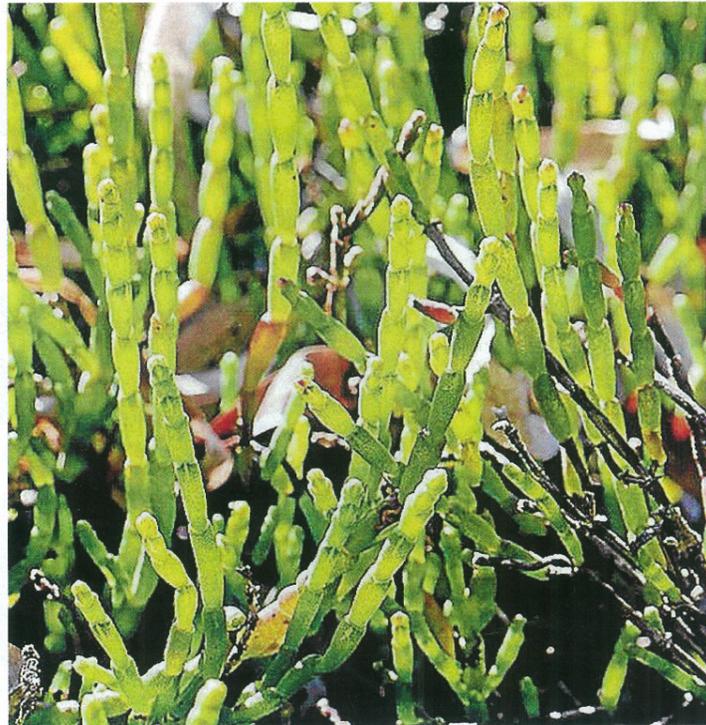
"The growing area is separated from the cattle grazing and designated for samphire only.

They approached wholesale fruit and vegetable dealer John Rarity Wholesale in the Hunter Valley, NSW. The firm became interested and arranged for samphire to be used as a vegetable in various hotels and restaurants. "We now have agents in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and we are also looking for people to take it to farmers markets," Andrew said.

The coastal property at the mouth of the Snowy River has some



ABOVE: A jar of pickled samphire, a popular consumption option.



RIGHT: Resembling miniature asparagus, samphire has a crisp and crunchy texture and is also known as sea asparagus or glasswort.



ABOVE: Gabrielle Bakey and Andrew French, Snowy River Station, NSW, with their packaged offerings of samphire.

future machinery will come and they are also working on designing this at the moment as they have a lot of in-house experience in machinery design.

Samphire is harvested by hand using scissors with pickers crawling on their hands and knees to pick it. The plots are dried out to make it easier to harvest.

Only the fine green tips that are soft and juicy are picked and Andrew has developed methods to grow these tips over the past four years so the plant/tip ratio has increased a lot which in turn increases yields.

Samphire growing in the wild has a very woody stem with about only 20 percent usable. However, by developing specific methods Andrew has achieved a yield about 85pc by reducing the amount of woody stem in the plant/tip ratio.

Samphire is in season from October to April, with the best months being late November, December, January and February.

Snowy River Station Samphire is sold in 3kg boxes, while 100gm punnets are being introduced this season. It is also sold pickled in a jar.

They are also selling it at Harris Farm Markets (NSW) and are in discussion with Perfection Fresh as well as selling straight to chefs and restaurants, and at the farm gate to the public.

Farm gate price is \$55/kg with discounts for regular restaurants and providers.

"Last year we sold 812kg of samphire" Andrew said. "Yes, it is very sustainable now we are working with nature not fighting it. The market is expanding and there is a lot of interest in samphire's health benefits."

Visit snowyriverstation.com.au



'Old methods', new credits

SNOWY River Station samphire was announced as the best new product at the 2011 Delicious Produce Awards last month. Snowy River Station won in the From the Earth section, amid 1000 nominations from all over Australia. Andrew and Gabrielle attended the presentation in July at the Sydney Opera House – hosted by celebrity chef Matt Preston and Bill McEwan, general manager of Dilmah Tea. Andrew and Gabrielle said they looked forward to supplying fresh and pickled Samphire this season (October - April), and also planned a samphire sausage, made from their own Snowy River Station high-country Hereford cattle, which they promise to be a "taste sensation".

freehold land that has been man-made to be very much like Holland. It is below sea level and water is kept out with levy banks.

"At high tide we can control the flow of saltwater over the paddocks with a very large flood gate," Andrew said. "The very fertile sandy soil in the paddocks of this particular property grows very lush green tips of samphire, a quality we have not seen overseas and we believe a quality that will be hard to match.

"The paddocks once held a milking dairy herd, so you can imagine how fertile they are and we have about 31ha sown and prepared for this coming season."

Snowy River Station samphire is grown with saltwater from the entrance of the pristine Snowy River

which has no industry or large-scale boating on it. It is flushed by the sea 24 hours a day so is fresh and pure.

The samphire has been tested for toxins and chemicals and Andrew emphasises care should be taken when eating samphire that is not from a known place and a clean environment – samphire grown in saltwater estuaries can often contain these pollutants as it will take up whatever toxins and evils are in the water it drinks or the soil it grows in.

Poached samphire can be dangerous if growing in a built-up area and it is illegal to take samphire from the wild or in national parks as it is protected in most states.

When it comes to planting, seed heads are spread into furrowed

The very fertile sandy soil in the paddocks of this particular property grows very lush green tips.

and prepared ground and the plots are then flooded with saltwater so that the seed sets.

Once this has occurred the plots are then drained using the flood gate and low tides and then dried out so that initial work on the plots can be carried out.

By only using organic principles on the farm, pests and diseases have not been a problem.

One of the two problems facing the growing of samphire is boggy country, and the fact that everything, including pumps and machinery rusts in the saltwater.

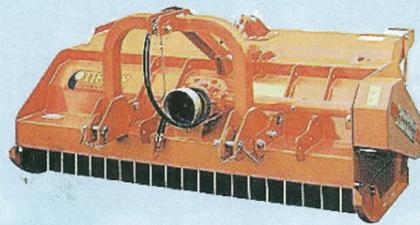
It is because of this and the fact that there is no suitable machinery for the large-scale production available that keeps the cost of samphire high.

Andrew believes that in the



FCR STICKRAKES

- Suitable for orchard and vineyard
- Heavy duty construction
- Oil bath gearbox
- Single and double models available



TIERRE MULCHERS

- Hydraulic side shift available
- Heavy duty construction and gearbox
- Ideal for orchard, vineyard and general mulching
- Available in 1m to 6m sizes



UNDER TREE SLASHER

- For slashing between trees and posts
- Hydraulic driven
- Spring loaded with rotating disc
- Single or double sided



TWIN FAN TOWER SPRAYERS

- Unique twin fan model
- Suitable for large tree canopy – stone fruit and citrus
- Anti-rotational fans
- Air blast models also available in 1500, 2000, 3200 and 4200ltr trailed units



AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY SPECIALISTS

P: (02) 6964 3400

E: info@guidolinagrimac.com.au

W: www.guidolinagrimac.com.au