



Adding value makes Limery a provincial powerhouse

By Katrina Walsh

From producing whole fruit to lime juice so pure it takes margaritas to an entirely new level, Wairoa powerhouse The Limery is growing fast and is taking its community along for the ride.

Just a year after they first fired up their dinky Italian juicing machine, a Wairoa couple has received a Provincial Growth Fund loan that will help them take their business to the next level.

"Everybody seems to think it is a grant and that we are suddenly rolling in it, but it's just a loan... albeit one with

pretty good terms," laughs The Limery co-owner Dianne Downey.

"What they told us was that they could tell that we would undertake the necessary expansion, but that a loan would help us get there quicker.

"Because this is a fully-integrated facility encompassing growing, processing, packing and marketing, we always knew we could handle more fruit than we could actually grow," Paul says.

"So we reached out to the community to see if anyone else in the region would be willing to grow limes, and the response has been amazing."

To date, 11 landowners have opted in to be supplier orchards, adding around 8,000 trees to Kopu Road Orchard's

4,000, with The Limery committed to taking their produce to sell both as whole fruit and as juice.

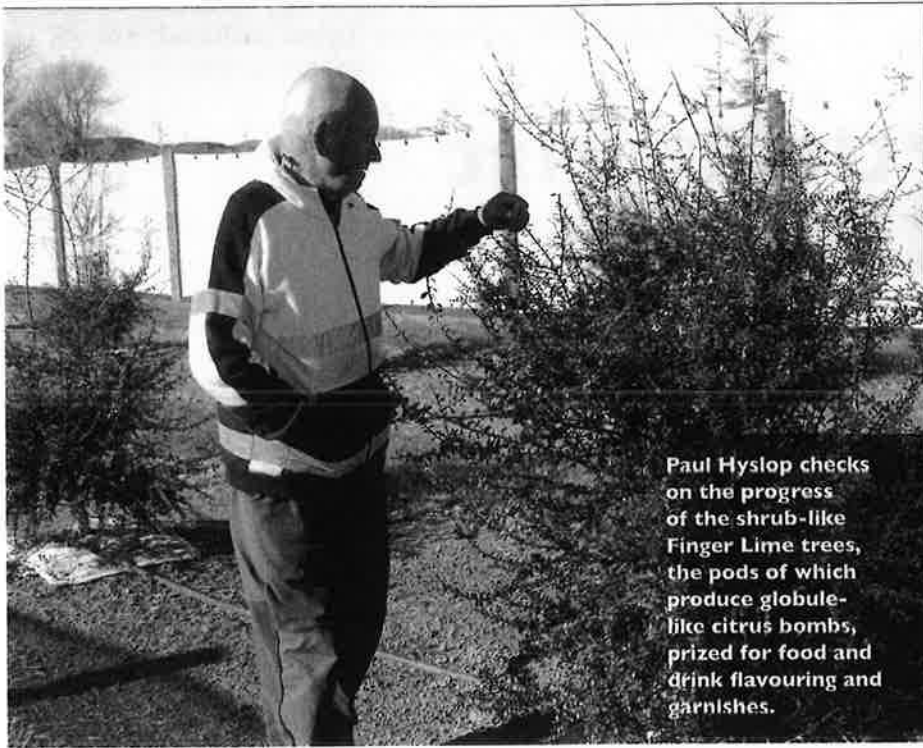
And there's room for many more.

"Basically, we'd have to plant from our place all the way to Gisborne (nearly 100 kilometres away) to serve just the domestic market," says Paul.

Meanwhile, ever the beverage professional, ideas-woman, Dianne had long dreamed of bringing to New Zealand the globulous spheres from the pods of the bushy finger limes so ubiquitous to the Australian desert.

Prized as a food garnish or that extra special something added to champagne and cocktails, the little citrus bombs had proved elusive as an import product as their structure did not respond well to freezing.

Just a few years after they were planted, various lime varieties are already in strong production at Dianne Downey and Paul Hyslop's Kopu Road Orchard, home of The Limery, in Wairoa.



Paul Hyslop checks on the progress of the shrub-like Finger Lime trees, the pods of which produce globule-like citrus bombs, prized for food and drink flavouring and garnishes.



So Dianne decided to produce her own, planting the 42 finger lime trees she hopes will help supply the hospitality industry in years to come.

Like the orchard itself, the production facility with its gleaming stainless steel tanks and juicing plant is fully Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) certified, signifying a level of professionalism Dianne and Paul wanted right from the start.

As it stands, The Limery sells about 60% of its product as whole fruit, and juices the rest to supply 750ml now-recyclable bottles of lime or lemon juice to the hospitality industry and a selection of retail outlets, with plans for 300ml bottles well underway.

What was attractive to the Provincial Growth Fund was how The Limery – whose staff of two (plus Paul and Dianne) will soon double to four, as well as extra seasonal workers – takes the community with it as it grows.

As far as the orchard goes, in addition to opening its arms to other growers it has a strong relationship with local beekeepers and is available to local students, who use their time there to help earn qualifications in horticulture, science and economics.

On the processing side, as most of their partner growers are a couple of years away from production, Paul and Dianne are using their shiny Bertuzzi juicer to process fruit for other citrus

Wairoa's cool nights tend to produce limes with thin skin and yellow colour, which can be confounding for retail buyers expecting a greener hue, but makes the fruit particularly suitable for juicing.

growers from around the Gisborne and Hawke's Bay regions, and further afield.

"It seems strange that a year ago our juicer was not even in operation and now we are already in a really exciting growth phase," Paul says.

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