

# Pungent smell, tasty treat

By Kate Taylor

Moorabool's only truffle farm has produced its first tiny treat, and it could soon be appearing on plates at local dinner parties.

Weighing in at just 109 grams, the French Black Truffle, grown by local Ian Woodhouse, commands the traditional retail price of \$2000 per kilo, or \$2 for each gram – selling for \$218.

But as Ian explains, the point of growing them is for average people to have the chance to cook with – and eat – one of the world's most famous delicacies.

"What we're trying to do is to make people realise that you only need 20g or 25g of truffle to make a really interesting meal for six or eight people – for the price of a bottle of wine, you can have a very interesting meal," he said.

Ian found his first truffle on Sunday 3 June, after five years of building up the farm.

"This particular one we found by observation – some of the truffles are near the surface, and I was walking up and down the row and I found it."

Truffles grow on the roots of English and French oak trees – 1000 of which Ian and wife Merrilyn planted over seven acres, as inoculated seedlings, just five years ago.

"Merrilyn and I were farming, most of our working life, but we had two children – neither of which were interested in taking on a 500-cow dairy farm, so we decided that we'd like to do something different in our mature years, and looked at various possibilities, which included grow-



Ian and Merrilyn have approximately 7 acres of English Oak trees planted on their farm and are hoping to harvest more truffles in coming years.

ing grapes and olives, and we dismissed all of those as being too well-pursued, too many people in the business, and decided on truffles."

Though as Ian explains, the whole business of growing truffles is fraught with difficulty – he knows people who have had trees in the ground for 14 years and they've never found any.

"There's a huge amount to learn and know, and the industry's still learning."

It's taken a lot of hard work – changing the soil profile and mineral content to suit the fungus, not to mention the seven kilometres of rows that Ian checks every day on a quad bike.

"You need to do a lot of work to it – it's a long and expensive process, probably two years preparation before you even put the trees in."

Truffles also require the particular climate conditions found in Moorabool – they need frost conditions, among

others. The tallest of the trees is now just over two metres, and the tree that bore the truffle is barely over a metre high.

The truffles are also seasonal – it's unusual to find one early in June, and they peak at the end of July and continue through August and sometimes into September.

"At the moment I'm going around every day because it's an exciting process, but you'd probably only go through the truffle one day a week."

Ian is part of a group called The Secret Truffle Society, with four active growers from Creswick to Trentham and Daylesford and into Moorabool.

"And the interesting thing with truffles, just because they're there doesn't say they're ready to harvest – you have to wait until they're exactly ripe otherwise they're useless. They're pungent aroma lets you know they're ripe."

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### Don't Risk Blindness due to Macular Degeneration

Research released for Macular Degeneration (MD) Awareness Week, has revealed we significantly underestimate the role of family history in developing Macular Degeneration, the leading cause of blindness and vision loss in Australia.



The Bacchus Marsh eye clarity team: Kirstie, Colin and Tania.

Colin Gafan says there is great concern that one in seven Australians over the age of 50 (one million people) have some evidence of Macular Degeneration, a chronic disease with a prevalence four times that of Dementia and more than half that of Diabetes.

"We want all Australians and their families to see a future and not have precious memories robbed by this disease."

Bacchus Marsh eyeclarity optometrist, Colin Gafan says "All those at risk, which are those over 50 years or with a family history of Macular Degeneration, should have their eyes tested and macula checked. Family history is a risk factor, just as it is with other conditions such as heart disease and breast cancer. This is why it is critical for family members to also have their eyes tested and macula checked."

"We want Australians to know that Macular Degeneration is not a normal part of ageing. Never ignore any changes in vision and always seek help immediately as early detection is critical to saving sight," says Colin Gafan.

The MD national survey found an estimated 2.1 million Australians over the age of 50 years, those most at risk, are unaware that having a parent with Macular Degeneration increases their chances of developing the disease. Alarmingly, one in three Australians also believes that vision loss caused by Macular Degeneration is just a normal part of ageing.

"There are simple steps everyone can take to reduce their risk of developing Macular Degeneration and we want people to start by talking to their family about risk reduction measures. This includes having an eye test, adopting a healthy lifestyle and eating foods that are good for eye health including fish, foods with low GI and dark green leafy vegetables," said eyeclarity's Colin Gafan.

"We are calling on all Australians to make their family's macular health a priority by having their eyes tested and macula checked, especially those who are most at risk, that is, people over the age of 50 and those with a family history of the disease," said Colin Gafan.

For more information - [www.eyeclearity.com.au](http://www.eyeclearity.com.au) and download your eye health check list



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## Future leaders

By Kate Taylor

Students from Lal Lal Primary School have learned all about being positive role models at a youth leadership event.

The 2012 Impact Student Leadership Conference for primary students was held in Ballarat on Thursday 24 May, and four students from Lal Lal went along.

The event is a practical, hands-on and interactive learning experience that prepares students for their roles and responsibilities of leadership in their schools.

The Lal Lal student leaders, in Years five and six, brought back interesting ideas to develop at their school, especially through the Junior School Council.

Grade six students Amber Careana, 11, was one of the student leaders who attended the event.

"It was really cool. We played heaps of games, and we had to write heaps of stuff in our little leadership



Amy Hopper, Mason (Impact leader), Amber Caruana

booklets, and we learnt how to impact others, and how to be a leader.

"We learned that like if we always set up a game, then whoever sets it up is a leader, even though you don't know it," she said.

According to Amber, she learnt a lot of things that she can also use in her role on Junior School Council.

"I think that we can do that now, and just do things and set up events and stuff like that," she said.

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