

ROUND THE FARM TABLE

Chef and good keen man Al Brown chats to BFEA entrants from around the country and finds they're committed to sustainable farming – and growing delicious food.

At any one time there are up to 250,000 seedlings on Stephen and Sam Wade's Lynwood Avocado Nursery in Whangarei – in fact, half of all the avocados planted in New Zealand started their life here.

It's a far cry from when Stephen's parents John and Pamela took a punt and planted their first avocado trees on their grazing farm in 1983. None of the family had ever eaten an avocado let alone grown them!

"In the early days, none of us knew how to grow avocados. We compared ourselves to our equally fresh neighbours and were just happy if we were doing equally well – or badly!" laughs Stephen

Today Lynwood Avocado Nursery is the country's largest avocado nursery (13ha), producing some of the world's best avocado trees, and supplying New Zealand orchards, retail nurseries and customers around the world.

As the nursery has grown, so too has the Wade's vision to create lasting, positive change for their farm, region and industry, picking up three awards in the Ballance Farm Environment Awards, which has opened doors for them to continue to learn and share their knowledge.

Al Brown chats to them to find out more.

Al. I saw your vision on your website – it's awesome. Would you say that is the basis of your business?

Stephen: Yeah, 'Trees for the people, trees for the planet' is our vision. Sam wrote it, and at its simplest that is exactly what we do. Avocado trees are a sequester of carbon for the life of the tree!

Sam: But we look to make a difference everywhere – from capturing sunlight in our insulated greenhouses, to using sustainable waste products for potting. We hand-water to ensure no excess usage and return any waste organic material back into our own orchard, which not only acts as mulch but improves our soil structure.

Al. It's no wonder you've done so well in the Ballance Farm Environment Awards!

Sam: Yes, the awards have been great for us. We found it fantastic meeting judges with such a breadth of experience. Having them run an independent eye over everything we do and adding constructive feedback has been so valuable. They gave us insight that we are often too busy to see.

Al. And I know that you have held open days at the nursery, so the sharing continues. What's your advice for those who are starting out?

Stephen: We've always believed you never stop learning, so being open to new ideas from everywhere is really important. Even after 35 years we're still trialling new things every day. I've realised the more I know, the more I don't know.

Nº2 Stephen and Sam Wade. Plant propagators/horticulturalists, Lynwood Avocado Nursery, Maunu, Whangarei

WITH

Al Brown

Al. I love that you're always looking ahead. Over the next 20 years, what's going to make NZ ag and hort famous on a global stage do you think?

Sam: As a country we have an amazing story to tell based on great soils, abundant water, and strong ethical, environmental and safety standards, so I think there's a real opportunity there to bridge the gap between rural and urban, by reconnecting people to the source of their food.

Stephen: Going forward, we'll need to optimise land use, so we'll see more horticulture. But equally, our incredible grass-fed and free-range dairy and meat products will always play a vital role in our economy.

Al. Speaking of products, how good is an avocado?! What's your favourite variety?

Stephen: My absolute favourite is a perfectly ripe, nutty and creamy Hass avocado. There's barely a meal that goes by that doesn't include avocado.

Al. So, there's avocados included on the menu for dinner at yours then. Who are you inviting?

Stephen: I'm going to say... David Attenborough who might impart some of his wisdom, Winston Churchill to give one of his famous speeches, and Jeremy Coney to tell a few jokes and talk cricket.

Sam: Sam Hunt who is a national treasure and wordsmith, Billy Conolly for a good laugh and Kupe to hear about his fantastic journey and discovery of our beautiful unspoilt land.



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