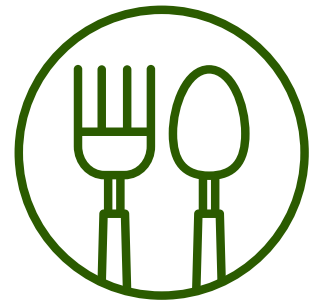


Local Food Innovators: Activate Foods



From humble beginnings helping out fellow gym-goers with their weekly meal preparation, **Megan Bowden** and her husband **Marty** are now delivering healthy, ready-made meals and snacks across the Central Coast, Sydney and Newcastle. We spoke to Megan about the couple's mission to prove that healthy eating doesn't have to leave a not-so-healthy hole in your wallet.

Can you tell us how Activate Foods came to be?

When Marty was working as a personal trainer, a client asked him to help with his 'meal prep', as Marty was already making his own weekly meals every Sunday. After a few months, Marty caved, telling the client that he'd help - on the condition that he'd take whatever he was given, and that it'd cost \$10 a meal.

A couple of other people in our gym soon found out about the arrangement, and from there, the word spread. Eventually, we were making so many meals that we either had to stop what we were doing or make something of it! So we did just that, and Activate Foods was born. The business is a perfect representation of what we are passionate about: delicious, healthy food, and an active lifestyle.

How has the business grown?

We first started in a commercial kitchen at Somersby, and launched our website in October 2016.

We quickly outgrew that space, and were over the moon when we secured a lease for the kitchen and retail space in the iconic **Caesars Coffee** building at Erina. Caesar and Frances, who still operate in Shop 1, have been very supportive and have provided us with guidance and advice from their many years of experience.

We are now delivering weekly meals to the Central Coast, Newcastle and Sydney, and our local customers can visit our retail store, buy some meals, and ask some questions. We make around 40 different meals and snacks, which are all gluten-free.

What makes you so passionate about the work you're doing?

It has played to both of our strengths - Marty is extremely passionate about making healthy food that's also delicious, while I love working behind the scenes and running the administrative side of the business.

For Marty in particular, it's the culmination of two passions: health and fitness, and food. He loves to create new flavours using natural ingredients, and will happily bounce out of bed at 2.30am on a Wednesday morning to travel to the markets in Sydney, hand-pick all of our fresh produce, and chat to the growers.

We both want convenient food options to be healthy, accessible and affordable. There are so many processed food options out there, and we're trying to show that you can eat really well for the same price, if not cheaper.

Marty has 19 years of hospitality experience up his sleeve, and has worked in great venues around the country. Why did you choose the Central Coast as the home of your business?

Originally, we moved to the Central Coast from Hamilton Island [in Queensland] because I grew up on the Coast, and I wanted to go to university. We thought we'd only be here for three or four years before we'd get itchy feet and want to move on to somewhere else. But we fell in love with living here. The lifestyle is perfect; we're so close to the beach, but we're also not far from Sydney and the Hunter Valley, and the people here are so friendly.

It's been 13 years, and we now have two young kids and a house at Bateau Bay. Marty's parents even made the move from the [NSW] Blue Mountains a couple of years ago. We specifically chose to open our Central Coast store at Erina, as it is central for a large portion of the population. We wanted our food to be accessible - not only for deliveries, but for the locals to be able to come in and talk to us about what they're trying to achieve.

Do you use any local produce in your creations?

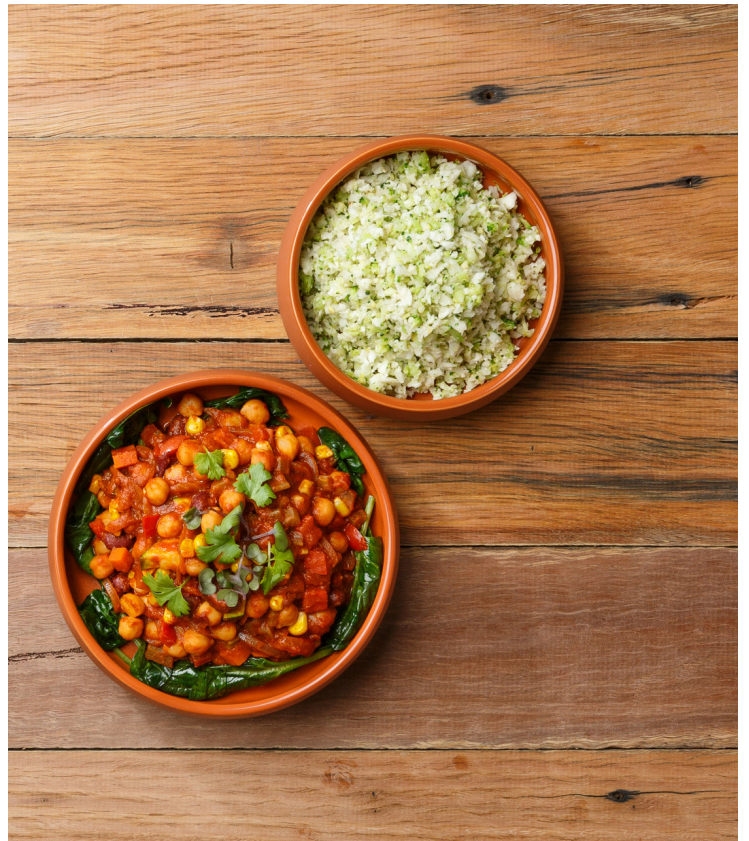
Our gluten-free sausages are from **Murphy's Quality Butchery** at Chittaway Bay, and we also stock local kombucha from **Zentient Culture**.

Imagine you have a friend who is visiting the Coast for the first time. What must-try food spots would you send them to?

This one is very easy for us - we love good food, and we love to share our finds with anyone who will listen. But for now, I'll restrict it to our two absolute favourites.

Our first pick is our weekly breakfast spot - **Cafe Mocha** at Bateau Bay. Our favourites are the chilli-scrambled eggs, and the beef cheek eggs benedict that frequents the specials board.

Our second pick is our favourite 'date night' spot - **BamVino** at Erina Heights. We opt to share a variety of tapas-style entrees, with our favourites being the tuna tostadas, and the grilled halloumi with fresh pesto and lemon. They have a great wine list, too!



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