

Local Food Innovators: ALAN Foods



After moving to the Central Coast in 2014, Michael Ridley and Alison Parkin built ALAN Foods, a **permaculture-framed market garden**, quite literally from the ground up.

With an "**all natural, all local**" approach to farming, sustainable and locally sourced produce is at the forefront of the business.

We caught up with Alison to find out more about how they're supplying **fresh, organic veg** to customers and venues all across the Central Coast.



What started as a humble home veggie patch soon grew to become a small-scale production. What would you say is the main point of difference for ALAN Foods?

We are a small-scale market garden using organic no-till principles and don't spray any chemicals on our produce – even the organically certified ones.

We grow everything we sell so that the consumer has the comfort of knowing exactly where their food comes from.

We've heard great things about your produce. What do you think keeps your customers coming back for more?

Everything is so fresh and tasty! Plus, our produce keeps longer in the fridge than supermarket-bought veg.

More and more businesses are choosing to highlight local produce on their menus. How does ALAN Foods support this trend within the hospitality industry?

We supply a small amount of microgreens and salad to local establishments, including a pub and catering business.



As business owners, you obviously understand the importance of supporting local. Are you currently working with any other Central Coast businesses?

Yes, we collaborate with Reko Ring Central Coast, which is soon likely to be renamed Central Coast Farmers Co-Op – an online farmers' market for local producers.

We've seen a lot of unprecedented events as of late. What one challenge has had the greatest impact on your industry specifically?

The rain! Each year our garden has been drenched with too much rain in late summer which has killed or decimated our crops. It has also affected the end of the season extension in some crops.

Yes, the recent weather events we've experienced have certainly been relentless. With La Niña settling in for the third year in a row, how are you preparing to take on another wet summer?

We have invested some money and time into capital works and utilised systems to improve drainage and airflow on the farm.

Sounds like a worthy investment! What type of support would be the biggest help to you in growing your business in the coming years?

Dropping the proposed new legislation regarding farm gates, farm tours and pick-your-owns.

Grants to allow us to continue to invest in new tools, seed supplies and education would also be beneficial.

And finally, where do you hope to see the Coast's hospitality industry heading in five years' time?

Quality farmers' markets where chefs are purchasing local produce and promoting the source on their menus.

Plus, we'd love to see more hubs on the northern end of the Coast with quality and diverse venues on offer.



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