

Cambinata Yabbies

Diversity is one key to survival in rural Australia to help even out the effects of drought and commodity fluctuations. Wheat farmers in Western Australia have put their dams to good use to develop a novel and thriving business, yabby production, which has an annual turn over of several million, with about 60 per cent of this export income. Cambinata Yabbies is beginning now to value-add to cope with periods of over-supply by producing gourmet yabbies.

Although a worker introduced yabbies into their dams years ago for private consumption, the Nenke family initially started processing yabbies for a Perth restaurant and then later exporting to Singapore at other people's requests. Today Mary and her family consolidate the yabbies from about 600 farms from across the south eastern wheat belt in six large tanks in their former hay shed plus a 13m x 3.8 refrigerated tank. These grain-fed yabbies are packed in polystyrene boxes with frozen gel packs and stay alive for at least seven days when chilled, more than adequate for the four hour journey by truck to Perth and air freight to the other side of the world.

In addition to creating work in the yabby processing area, Mary's Cambinata Yabbies has created a flow-on effect in the region as yabby traps, processing equipment and pelletised food are produced locally and the local transport firms are kept busy. Cambinata Yabbies thrives on the cooperation of many farmers, but its major threat is competition undercutting for short-term gain, rather than building greater demand and therefore, a long-term market.

Rapid improvements in communications technology, particularly the fax and Internet, have enabled Mary to fill and air freight an order any where in the world within 36 hours. Mary uses the Internet for communication and to seek new markets while orders still arrive largely by fax. The Internet is one way she can lift yabbies' profile in order to create a greater demand amongst gourmets and the health conscious around the globe for these renewable crustaceans.

This minor industry is also creating a positive shift in environmental attitudes on many farms across the south eastern regions of Western Australia as yabbies do not tolerate pesticides. Farmers and Agriculture WA now use chemical sprays very selectively and farmers manage their water in a different way to minimise run-off.

Investigate their web site at www.cambinatayabbies.com.au .