

North East farm gate trail exploration underway

HAWKESBURY Harvest Farm Gate Trail co-founder Dr Ian Knowd has visited Victoria's North East to explore the potential for developing a seasonal farm gate trail across the region.

Dr Knowd met with farmers and makers, Alpine, Wangaratta, Indigo council representatives and Tourism North East staff to discuss the benefits of a farm gate trail model and how it supports small-scale farming, food production and innovation, tourism, economic development and maintains a cultivated landscape.

The Hawkesbury Harvest Farm Gate Trail, which tracks Sydney's north-western perimeter along the Hawkesbury River, opened 20 years ago and has become a destination food and tourism trail.

"The trail uses smartphone technology to enable locals and visitors to explore what produce is available locally and seasonally and guide them to farm gates where they can interact with farmers and buy produce," Dr Knowd said.

"The free app is supported by a website showing what's in season, where it's available and how to get to each participating producer."

Dr Knowd later completed a doctorate in the use of tourism to support regional development and small-scale agriculture.

"What's known as the 'Sydney Basin' produces huge amounts of food," he said.

"When we set up the original farm gate trail there was an attitude in gov-

ernment that this rich, historic farmland could all just disappear under housing.

"Few in the NSW Agriculture Department saw small-scale production as worthy of attention or recognised its value.

"I see similarities in Victoria, where agricultural policy, government interest and funding seem particularly focussed on export markets, but I'm really encouraged by Agriculture Victoria's Artisanal Food Sector project which is targeted at food production."

Hawkesbury Harvest farm gate trail has been highly successful and has come to include other farming regions beyond Sydney and re-badged as 'Harvest Trails and Markets'.

The opportunity for trail development in the North East would mark the not-for-profit organisation's expansion interstate.

Beechworth-based food sector strategist Peter Kenyon is supporting Dr Knowd's visit.

"The North East has a vibrant small-scale food sector producing cool-climate fruits, nuts, oils and other horticultural products, wine, dairy and lamb, beef, venison, pork and fish," Mr Kenyon said.

"Coupled with a burgeoning tourism industry, a farm gate trail could provide a logical fit," he said.

"People want to connect with the place they're visiting through authentic experiences and local people want to support local food production.

"What connects you more to your landscape than eating from it?"



KNOWS A THING OR TWO: Dr Ian Knowd is exploring the possibility of a farm gate trail across North East Victoria.