

The people say “no” to plan for \$600 market trader levy

A W'bool City Council plan to introduce a \$600 market trader fee has hit a wall of protest.

WCC plans to hit market traders with \$600 fee

The WCC has sparked a near riot with its plan to hit market stall holders with a new \$600 a year fee.

Has food ever felt this good?



These felt lobsters are among Tara Davies' range of "foods" that are being snapped up.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] W
[/dropcap]hen **Tara Davies** began stitching and sewing items to sell at her first market, she didn't expect some of her best customers to be five year olds.

Yet it is Tara's range of "felt food" that has since been flying off her market stall like hot cakes or perhaps, more specifically, felt cup cakes, or felt gingerbread men ...

Each piece of felt food is hand made by Tara, right down to hand stuffing each individual yolk of the fried eggs, and her stall can sometimes look more like a grocery stand than a purveyor of crafts.

The kids and their parents, it seems, can't get enough of the fake fruit, steak, vegetables, seafood and pasta that might be inedible, but feels a lot better than plastic and is far more cuddly. More mature folk have also been known to snap up a lobster or a slice of watermelon just because they can't

resist touching them.

Tara, from Portland, comes from a family who have always enjoyed making things and her grandmother, in particular, loved painting, drawing and crocheting.

But like many women who have moved into the craft market scene, Tara started sewing a range of items just for fun and decided to sell a few online as **Sewww Pretty Handcrafted Gifts and Homewares** before trying out her own stall in the middle of last year.

“The response and feedback at the markets has been just amazing and it has gone in ways that I never, ever expected,” she said.



Tara Davies is reviving some of the crafts of yesteryear, like scrappy mats made from recycled fabrics.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] A [side from the felt food, Tara's hand-sewn heat packs and her version of the "scrappy mats" that were once so

popular in the 40s and 50s have proven to be winners.

The scrappy mats are made from recycled fabrics such as denim, felts or silks that are cut into strips and hand-knotted onto a backing mat. A small mat can involve up to 6000 individual pieces of material and take 10 days to complete, while the larger mats use up to 10,000 pieces: that means tying 10,000 knots.

“They are very time consuming, but luckily I find it relaxing and I can work on it in front of the TV,” Tara laughed.

The scrappy mats are also a direct link back to the crafts her grandmother did as a younger woman, when women would tear up old towels to make a “new” bathmat: who ever said up-cycling was a new concept?



Zero cholesterol and pure fun: the hand-stuffed and sewn fried eggs.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] W
[/dropcap]hile Tara has been delighted with how well her crafts have been received, she now suffers from a common complaint among her peers and that is finding the time – and space – to keep up with demand.

“My craft room is getting overloaded and I have already moved the sewing machine into the lounge room,” she said with a laugh.

Fortunately Tara’s boss – Sobey Services, where she has worked as office manager for the past 10 years – is understanding when it comes to occasionally needing flexible hours to prepare for a market.

“It never feels like there is enough time – if only we didn’t have to sleep!”



A heat pack or a hoot pack?

[box] Tara appears at various markets around the south-west region and you can find her on [Facebook here](#). [/box]



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Success is purely organic



Nick Kelson sells organic produce fresh from his uncle's farm at Dennington.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] W
[/dropcap]hen it comes to clocking up food miles, the 4.9km from Dennington to the Warrnambool Showgrounds is about as short as it gets.

This is how far the fresh produce travels each week from the Kelson family farm to a Sunday stall at the showgrounds, where **Nick Kelson** sells under the name **Merri Banks Organic Produce**.

Nick is the nephew of **Frank Kelson**, who has 16 acres at the back of the Dennington Oval, including 10 acres under production. The farm has been in the family since 1880 and produces potatoes, pumpkin, sweetcorn and garlic on a large scale for the Melbourne fresh food markets.

Fifteen years ago, Frank turned to organic production, making him one of the first in the region to do so.

"My grandfather was horrified," Nick said, laughing.

“He would say, ‘this house was built on super phosphate!’”

As Nick explains, however, his uncle could see the damage that chemicals were doing to the environment and realised that organic production was not only better for the long-term preservation of the farm, but that the produce tasted more like it should.



A pile of pumpkins was among the seasonal produce on sale last week.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] While the bulk of what Merri Banks produces is sold wholesale, locals are fortunate to have Nick selling a select range each week at the Sunday markets.

It is the only place where people can buy the produce direct.

The stall is the size of a couple of kitchen tables and Nick unloads his stock from the back seat and boot of a car, not a semi-trailer.

Some weeks he will have boxes of fresh dug potatoes in a

number of varieties, together with pumpkins, carrots and garlic. Other weeks there will be boxes of heritage tomatoes, sweetcorn and beetroot, alongside bouquets of kale, spinach and silverbeet.

It all depends what it is season.



Going, going, gone. Things move fast on market day.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] A [dropcap]dvertising is by word of mouth – and a trusty A-frame – with Merri Banks nowhere to be found on Facebook, Twitter or even as a website.

It is an old-fashioned, but winning approach, and Nick finds most of his stock is gone by mid-morning.

“We have been here four years now. It took a while to build

up, but we are doing well," Nick said.

Just as he spoke, a man approached to buy a purply bulb of organic garlic. Nick dropped it onto the scale.

"That'll be \$1.50," he said.

"Oh! I didn't realise it would be so cheap. I take another two thanks," the customer replied.

"No problem," said Nick, as he placed the bulbs into a brown paper bag and gave it a swing.



Organic garlic: not from China, Argentina or Chile...but Dennington.

[box type="bio"] Merri Banks Organic Produce. Sunday Undercover Markets, Warrnambool Showgrounds. [/box]

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