

Grower profile

Joe and Sonia Castro



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Name Joe and Sonia Castro

Location Myalup

Property size 194ha

Enterprises Carrots, potatoes, onions and parsnips



BY HAYLEY WILSON
VEGETABLESWA

Joe Castro started on his property in Myalup with nothing and has built it up to an extremely successful business that it is today.

Joe grew up working on his parent's farm in Kirup where they grew pumpkins, potatoes, tomatoes and had orchards and cattle. Joe worked on the farm until he finished high school; he then took some time off pruning apple trees on different properties in the region.

He then bought the property that they are currently on in 1991 and have expanded to own 445 acres and lease another 35 acres

today. Joe met Sonia in a friend's broccoli crop 17 years ago and have been married 15 years.

Currently, the Castros produce 2500 tonnes of potatoes per year and also carrots, onions and parsnips. Carrots are their primary crop which are mainly for the domestic market. They have recently started to export overseas and approximately 60% will go to overseas markets. Sonia said, "We pack and market all our own carrots so that's why they are the main stayer". They sell 30% of their onions peeled to GSF and Salad Fresh mainly for the fast food industry.

New technology has allowed them to improve their packaging and marketing and to do it themselves.

Joe said, "Everything has totally changed since we first started growing, everything is a lot more scientific and accurate. There is no wasting fertiliser or water as you can't

afford to these days as margins are getting smaller and smaller".

The advantage of being located in Myalup is that it allows them to grow carrots all year round. Myalup is a lot bigger, the ground is flatter with less rocks and it is always a little bit cooler in the summer months compared to Kirup where Joe is originally from. As opposed to a region like Gingin, Myalup is also less windy and a lot cooler. Being situated directly on the main highway also makes transportation to and from market very easy.

As all the produce that the Castros grow are mechanically harvested crops this drastically reduces labour. All the staff do all their work in a shed and not outside in the harsh sun or cold winter. Sonia said that, "we have a core group of staff and also backpackers who are in the area". Joe said that a lot of skilled staff move up north to work on the mines and growers can't compete with those types of wages that they are offered up there.

Joe said the industry has become much more competitive over the years and the standards have increased.

The supermarkets requirements and needs to pack to specification have greatly changed since Joe first started growing. Sonia said, "Now days you need to spend more money on packaging to make the product look good as everything is a lot more appearance based."

Joe said he doesn't think of growing as a job and he really enjoys meeting new people all the time. Joe had the opportunity to travel to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and then went to Orlando for a five day world horticulture trade show about packaging. Joe said that, "As you get more established then you have the chance to travel". Whilst over there, he was amazed at the different types of packaging that were in supermarkets in America compared what is on the shelves in Western Australia.

Joe said that if young people have family with an established property he would encourage them to continue on with the business and stay in the industry. He said, "20 years ago you could start small and build your way up but you couldn't do that today as there are much greater barriers to start up and it would be extremely costly."



Josh, Joe, Sonia and Danielle Castro.

Sonia said she will encourage her children, Danielle (14) and Josh (13) to get a trade or a university degree to fall back on if they wish to stay in the growing game as the industry is so uncertain. However, Joe and Sonia look forward to staying in the industry for many years to come and are looking to expand.

When Joe is not working he enjoys riding on his Harley. Joe and Sonia have started cycling and enjoy spending time with their family. 🚲🚲

