

# Grower profile

## David and Ben Ellement



BY HAYLEY WILSON  
VEGETABLESWA

### Grower profile

**Name** David and Ben Ellement

**Location** Hammond Park

**Property size** 10ha

**Enterprises** Leeks



David and Ben Ellement are passionate young growers who are the main player in the leek game in Western Australia.

Located in Hammond Park, the Ellement family have been on the property for 35 years which was first started by father, Gary. Ben has been working at the farm for 12 years, before which he was working as a mechanic by trade. After working at vegetablesWA when it was first established and then being the CEO of the Wine Industry Association, David also then made the decision to work at the family business one year ago.

When the Ellements first began they were growing brassicas, leafy vegetables and carrots. Today, they are the main suppliers of leeks in WA with 25 acres of land under crop production. Ben said, "20 years ago, every grower grew everything, but over the years there became the need to specialise and grow bigger units of each crop."

The reason the Ellements went into solely growing leeks was there was a market opportunity as another grower was leaving the industry and the Sumich Group approached them to grow for export. After doing this, it was an easy transition into supplying for the supermarkets as they had similar systems in place. They now sell to all supply chains and focus on selling under supply agreements as David says, "It is dangerous to just grow the crop and then hope you sell it."



Growing practices and experience allows the Ellements to grow leeks all year round. This is also because of the soils and the metropolitan climate.

As leeks are in the ground for such a long period of time, David says that weed control is a constant issue. Also due to the long growing period, if something goes wrong with the crop it can majorly affect the business' profitability as it takes a substantial amount of time to recover. David said, "Weather is something we constantly work with. Understanding the growth of crop and meeting sales windows are critical and weather can play a major role in this."

David said, "Technology is critical these days, we are continually investing in harvesters, pickers and other machinery to reduce labour."

He went on to say, "Farm management is critical from the office; we need to know the cost of every unit coming out of the ground." Technology has improved growing dramatically and David said, "If growers were growing the same as they were 5–10 years ago they wouldn't be profitable as costs keep going up but the returns remain the same."

When their parents first started growing, everything was done by hand where as now days there isn't one job on the property which isn't machine aided. He said since the start of the property, equipment and farming practices are the biggest change. Growers now also have the advantage of

data knowledge and being able to make decisions based on knowing all inputs and outputs. Ben said since the farm first started there is, "A lot more organic practices used, as the cost of fertiliser has increased so much, you need to have your organic program down pat otherwise fertiliser bills shoot right up."

David says the advantages of being located in the metro area are the access to staff and the property being located close to market. However due to their surroundings they are restricted on expansion of the farm.

Even though the Ellements are the major player in leeks in WA, they are still a small family business. David said that throughout the years the supermarkets have got more professional which has helped transformed small family businesses into a more business culture. He said that supermarkets have been a real positive for their business and the industry as they have created a stability which allows growers to do long term business planning.

David and Ben both said that it is the flexibility and the lifestyle which they enjoy. David said, "vegetable businesses aren't there to make huge profits, it's a lifestyle decision not a financial one." Ben also added that seeing the fruits of your labour is what he enjoys, and, "it is really rewarding to see a good crop".

They both agree that it is really important to have family around and having everybody involved is the main aspect of what they love about growing. 