

Hayden Darveniza – Pawpaw South Johnstone

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Name: Hayden Darveniza **DOB:** 25/5/1971

Who is in your farming family?

I farm with my brother and our families. My wife (Brigid) and I have 3 boys and my brother his wife have 3 girls. My boys are 19 (at uni), 18 (gap year on the farm) and 15 (Year 10 at school).



We have 3 dogs Millie, Sarah and Josie. The shed cat is Harry, he's big and black and white - he hangs out at the shed. We've got more cats at the house – Jeffrey, the ginger ninja, cause he's a bit crazy and Kat – just Kat, K-A-T. We are too busy for any other pets.

Where is your farm and what do you farm?

We're at South Johnstone. We farm pawpaw, red and yellow, but mostly yellow. So about 75% of our crop is yellow, because that's what sells best in the market. Even though we grow reds, and they taste better in my opinion, they don't look as good, they have a few marks on the skin and can have odd shapes, so consumers prefer the yellow pawpaw. We have about 100ac under pawpaw that we supply directly to Coles stores along the eastern states. We buy certified seed, grow our own seedlings and plant them out from there.



We also grow some bananas, cane and some cattle. That keeps us all interested.

What is your farming background?

I grew up on the farm, went to uni and returned here to farm with the family. My degree was in Horticulture at Gatton Uni. My grandfather and great-grandfather both went to Gatton – I guess it's a bit of a family tradition. I still have my grandfather's blazer from uni. My mother's family are the Scheu's and they've been farming in South Johnstone since 1882.



The Darveniza's have been farming in South Johnstone since 1906. We have been on different farms but in the same district since then – a long time.

Farming Memories - What has been so special for you living on a family farm?

There's one story I tell my kids all the time because it's a bit unusual these days. When I was a boy, we always had a house cow or two and it was my job to do the milking. I did it myself from Grade 3 to Grade 10. I used to wake up in the morning by myself, just a little kid really, and go and milk the cows. There's one thing I could count on, I would be stinking of everything – cow pee, manure and milk!! I would jump in the shower and use as much soap as I could to get rid of the smell or I'd be catching the school bus still smelling. In the afternoon, it was the same thing, more milking and you'd have to lock the calf up overnight so there was milk in the morning for us.



Not many people still milked cows, so it was quite a big responsibility for me as a youngster. The milk was for our home and also I would deliver milk to our worker's house. The workers would give me a couple of dollars for the milk and I would use it for my bus money to get to school. It gave me a good work ethic, you couldn't miss a day...the cow had to be milked every day regardless. It was a good way to grow up with a sense of responsibility. The worst thing was being worried about catching the bus smelling of cow poo!!

Our farm is on the South Johnstone River, so we grew up fishing on the river every weekend and swimming in the river after school most afternoons. Crocodiles were never an issue in the river back then. We swam up until about the year 2000 before we started to see crocodiles. Nowadays you see a croc down the river every day sitting on the sand bar just opposite the house. It's just that the crocs have had a chance to re-populate all the areas they once inhabited before being hunted out. There was never any thought of there being a crocodile on the river when I was growing up. My dad, who was born in 1940, never worried about crocodiles in the river either. They are definitely there now and there's no swimming.

Black bream or sooty grunter was what we fished for. We'd eat them. It's probably illegal now, but we had fish traps and spear guns. We grew up with spear guns. I even shot myself in the leg once. It was in Grade 8, I was wagging school with some mates on the last day of the school year. The spear accidently went through the calf muscle just behind my shin! One of my mates was the fastest runner, so we chose him to run back to my mum for help. She knew we were not at school but she didn't know we were mucking around with spear guns – I was in a bit of trouble.

When the ambulance came, I was waiting on the other side of the river and the ambulance person couldn't swim so it was a bit of a drama. I ended up in the ambulance after a while, they took me into the hospital and I had to have the spear cut out of my leg. It left me with a nice scar to remind me. I've never wagged school ever again – much safer just to go to school!



Farming Life Experiences - Family farming presents many challenges which often involve considerable effort to resolve. What experiences can you recall which presented you and your family with a significant problem?

In my late 20's I started up a new farm up near Mareeba. I was away from the family farm and had to work things out for myself. I was farming in a new area with different soils and a different climate. The way we overcame some of the problems was just by asking local people who knew and could help us. We put that information together with the knowledge that we had. We also looked into available technology -things like moisture meters and different monitoring equipment to work out how much and when to water. You can also test the nutrient levels in plants and work out when and what to fertilise.

Looking Back - What lessons were learnt? What has your farming life taught you?

Be resilient. There are things you can't control like the weather. Especially in Innisfail, we have cyclones and you can't control that. A cyclone can easily wipe out a pawpaw crop. Then it takes you 18 months to get back on your feet. Also, you have to be resilient to prices – we are price takers. Prices can be high one month and very low the next. You have to roll with the punches.

Always look on the bright side of life. There's no point complaining. You could complain about the weather or prices 24/7. Look on the bright side and hopefully things go your way.

Have a good work ethic and work hard. If you put in the efforts as a farmer you can reap the rewards. It's a matter of putting the hard work in. There's satisfaction in looking at a good crop. A lot of times I think of myself as a gardener. You do a few jobs on the farm and drive around and your farm looks good, it's a nice environment. You're like a gardener that's cut the grass and pulled a few weeds out...it looks good, it's satisfying.

When I finished uni I worked in the sugar industry for a couple of years. Didn't matter how hard I worked, I still got the same amount in my pay packet at the end of the week. But as a farmer, working for myself, the amount of work you put in can be directly proportional to the amount of money you can make. So that's a good motivator – effort equals reward.



The 'lifestyle of farming' that people talk about was from a long time ago. I've never had a great lifestyle as a farmer, we work hard and we do big hours sometimes. It can be a bit demoralising at times, but then there can be times you get paid 3 times the effort that you put in. You have choices, being your own boss, you can take a day off or have an easy day. You make your own decisions and you're not told what to do by someone else. Of course the flip side is, you also hold the responsibility for all your decisions. My life is the same as anyone else with a job in town, you work hard and you try to have your weekends off if you can.