

PEOPLE

The Good life



Hamish Gale living the good life.

Goat Milk Soap

Tomato Relish



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Divine Goat Milk Fetta



It is early morning and Pop Thorne meanders down to Brighton beach with his wheelbarrow to collect seaweed; it's a regular trip. Returning home, he washes and ferments it down in a barrel. Samples of the resultant fertilizer tested by Lincoln University show it to be near perfect, with everything a growing plant needs. But you didn't need to tell Pop that.

Twenty-five years on and his grandson, Hamish Gale, inspired partly by these early memories of sustainable living, ditched his frenetic Gold Coast existence and went to sea. He sold his house, built two yachts and spent four months sailing one of them. "I'm 6'2 and in a yacht there's usually about 5 foot headspace. After one too many bumps to the head I decided that wasn't for me," he chuckles. Trading seas for trees, Hamish purchased 'Tumble Downs' at 'Crooble' a property an hour out of Goondiwindi. He co-exists there with two cats, two peacocks, six beehives (another nine on the way), two goats - Happy and Gwenivere - and various other feathered friends. "I bought the birds in Boggabilla - fifteen chooks, two guinea fowl and six fully-grown geese - and drove them home in my car," recalls Hamish. "It was a noisy, smelly, messy trip."

Goondiwindi, it turns out, is ideal for the good life. Unlimited supplies of manure from the feedlots, cotton trash compost and a technically Savannah landscape ideal for certain livestock. Hamish's purebred Anglo-Nubian milking goats are a middle-Eastern breed, which are tolerant of hot, dry climates. "I've seen them sitting out in the sun," says Hamish, "eschewing the shade in 40-degree heat."

Cool goats can still get hot under the collar. Hamish tells the story of the time Happy was in rut. "I had my back to Happy when I walked over to Gwen. I heard this snort and turned round. There's Happy drawn up on his hind legs, at an imposing 8 feet, lining me up." Happy wasn't happy. "He bore down on me and I had to grab him by the horns." Asserting authority is a matter of dropping the goat to the ground and sitting on it until it is still. "I've tried it once," laughs Hamish. "It took me half a day to catch Gwen for milking the first time and even then I only got half a cup." The star-picket shackling Gwen for milking has since been replaced by a milking machine and a stand.



For a long time Hamish has been interested in perma-culture - a way of living which promotes a harmonious balance between all forms of life within the ecosystem. It's a practical and creative approach to the problems of diminishing resources. Hamish is increasing his herd of goats to fourteen to meet the demand for the gourmet products he makes from his goats' milk, which he is now proficient in getting. His plain and marinated feta, with half the cholesterol of cow's milk, are for family and friends but his divine moisturizing soaps - rose, lavender, amber & musk - are on sale at Nutmeg Home, "excellent" for anyone with skin conditions.

Hamish's day job - aside from fending off attacking caprines - is local advertising manager for Breeze FM, an easy-listening station and Rebel FM, a classic rock station. "No other station has a dedicated local Goondiwindi representative," says Hamish. The stations are broadcast in over fifty towns throughout Queensland and New South Wales and as part of their charter they are committed to providing local content and supporting local events like Relay for Life, River Jam and the Gundy B&S. They are the major radio sponsors for Gourmet in Gundy, this area's premier food and wine festival. Goondiwindi businesses, as in many rural centres, are doing it tough. Hamish believes it is part of our responsibility as people who live and work here to support them, hence his shop local project. "Money spent locally is earned locally and can then be spent locally again," says Hamish. "It's the multiplier effect and it shows how important and enriching shopping in your neighbourhood can be for the local economy."

So how does this adman reconcile his radio work with the relative freedom of raised garden beds and compostable toilets? "My work is about community and my lifestyle is now too," says Hamish. "On the Coast I lived in a gated community and didn't know residents who lived ten meters from my front door. Now, I have neighbours dropping in for a cup of tea and they live a kilometer off. Some people say I'm crazy, that I'm in the middle of nowhere," he says. "I tell them this is my place, where I make my stand and far from being in the middle of nowhere, I'm in the center of everything." No man - goat or peacock - is an island.

Order Hamish's products online, including a divine tomato relish (third generation recipe!) at www.countrylifegourmetfoods.com

Words: Carolyn Stuart
Images: Erin Corish



Happy the goat has plenty to smile about!



PS. Since this story was written Gwenivere is the proud Mum of twin boys.



his future

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