



The Farm

Our farm is located in tropical North Queensland in the Burdekin Shire about 45 minutes south of Townsville. We're a family-owned farm that primarily grows mangoes, beef cattle and pasture raised egg laying hens with a major emphasis on using regenerative farming practices to improve the land, produce healthier food and minimize fertilizer and chemical inputs. This emphasis on regenerative agriculture has often resulted in the implementation of practices that are somewhat unusual on a modern mango farm.

The Best Tasting Mangoes

If you've tried the fruit from our Mango Fundraiser or purchased one of our Bowen Special Mangoes from a shop or one of our trading partners, you're probably asking, why do these mangoes taste so good? With 40 years in the mango industry, we put it down to 4 main things

1. The mango variety (Bowen Mangoes)
2. Harvesting only Mature Fruit
3. Storage and Transport
4. Farming Methods

The mango variety - Bowen Special Mangoes

On our mango farm we pretty much exclusively grow Bowen Mangoes (otherwise known as Bowen Special or more formally as Kensington Pride). Why do we only grow this mango? Quite simply because it's the best. There are many other breeds, new and old that are grown for a variety of reasons such as:

- Better yields
- Better shelf life
- Better visual appearance
- Earlier harvest season

· Later harvest season

But no other breed has the uniquely delicious flavour of the Bowen Mango. They may not have the highest yields, or the best visual appearance but no other variety has yet matched the Bowen's eating experience.

Harvesting

Timing is critical when harvesting mangoes. A mango needs to be picked when it's mature not ripe. A mature mango is still firm and green on the outside but has flesh that has begun to turn yellow on the inside. If picked from the tree too early (when it's immature) it will not reach its full flavour. If the fruit is allowed to reach full maturity on the tree it can be picked firm & green and will ripen well at room temperature. If the mango is picked before it is fully grown & mature, it will not ripen properly and will taste bland when it eventually softens & ripens. During a mango season, market prices start high then steadily drop until the end of the season so farmers are always tempted to get their fruit to market early which inevitably leads to immature fruit being picked and bland tasting mangoes in shops.

At The Mango Fundraiser, we go to a lot of trouble to make sure that every fruit is picked mature. For 20 years now we have been using specially designed "cherry pickers" that allow each mango to be picked by hand so the picker gets a good look at the mango before it is removed from the tree. We have to pick each tree up to 5 times each season to allow all the fruit to develop the plump swollen cheeks so characteristic of a delicious ripe Bowen Mango.

You can tell if a mango was picked mature because it "puffs up" and its skin stretches to become quite smooth. It takes a lot of practice to be able to pick only the mature mangoes and usually a tree must be picked two or three times to get each mango at full maturity as not all the fruit on a tree matures at the same time.

Storage and Transport

Two things are critical when transporting or storing mangoes: time and temperature. When you cool a mango down, it takes longer to ripen and therefore longer to perish. Market agents and supermarkets will do this for various reasons such as taking advantage of the market price or to match supply and demand or simply for logistical purposes. However, when the storage temperature drops below 18°C, the ripening process is affected and flavour will be negatively impacted.

For this reason, at the Mango Fundraiser we always take care to store and transport our mangoes between 18°C and room temperature. This means we are time limited in getting our mangoes to our customers which is why we usually only hold mangoes on the farm for between 1 to 4 days before sending them to the fundraising school or organisation.

Farming Practices

Fertilizer Management

One of the keys to producing high quality mangoes is correct fertilizer application. Too much fertilizer will give increased yields and increased fruit size but will be detrimental to the quality and taste of the mango. On our farm our main source of applied fertilizer is biodunder (a byproduct of ethanol production) which we apply only once a year. We also use a single application of gypsum as well as a few applications of various trace elements.

Livestock Integration

On our mango orchard we use a farming method known as Silvopasture which is the practice of integrating tree crops with livestock. In the past we've trialled sheep, cattle and chickens but for ease of management we now primarily use self-shedding sheep (or hair sheep) and occasionally cattle. The livestock provide all sorts of benefits in the orchard including:

- Grass and weed suppression between and underneath the mango trees
- Reducing the amount of mowing and consequently reducing soil compaction between the trees
- Completely eliminating the use of herbicides underneath the tree (applying herbicide to the growth underneath the trees is standard industry practice).
- Aiding to cycle nutrients by turning pasture into manure.

We practice rotational grazing with the sheep which means the sheep are moved every 2 to 3 days throughout the whole orchard.

Biological Farming

At The Mango Fundraiser farm we are always trying new growing techniques that reduce our reliance on chemical pesticides and soluble fertilizers.

We have found over many years, that the more natural diversity you have in your plant life, insect life and animal life and soil life, the more resilient and productive your farm can be.

The challenge of course is to develop ways of enhancing all this life while at the same time having efficient harvesting and growing systems.

Our latest practice comes from Mexico where many farmers have been developing systems for soil life enhancement from cheap & simple nutrient sources. Here we have learned ways of culturing beneficial organisms in liquid cultures that we call biofertilizers. We source these organisms from the local forests and grow them in our biofertilizers to be applied in the orchard. These are early days but initial responses are encouraging.

Of course many of these "biological" products are not as potent as "agro chemicals" but they are much more friendly to handle and much cheaper to produce, so you have to apply them more frequently.

We have found with farming, as with most things in life, the more you focus on promoting beneficial life instead of concentrating all your energy on killing the things you don't like, the better the whole system operates.

