



# Growing a value chain from

# rainforest fruit



Ten years ago Martha Shepherd (pictured) had not heard of the crops she now grows – crops that put her on the path to win the first national Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation’s (RIRDC) Rural Women’s Award last May.

Martha, along with her partner David Haviland, grows native rainforest fruit that thrives on their small farm, Galeru, on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast hinterland.

The farm’s success and the interest it generated among regional property owners led Martha to enter the awards

as a way to finance the development of a business model that could enable several small growers and processors to collaborate for the greatest benefit.

The value chain model works when primary producers look at the end products consumers buy, and find ways to maximise the value of their crop through the production process.

“The model assumes cooperation but doesn’t dictate what structure should be used, so it remains flexible to maximise value and minimise costs,” Martha said.

The RIRDC Rural Women’s Award recognises the contribution rural women make to their communities and seeks to build on that contribution by supporting the development of skills and abilities. Winners receive a \$10,000 bursary to help them further develop their skills and abilities.

## RIRDC Rural Women’s Award winners

**National and Queensland award winner: Martha Shepherd.** Martha plans to develop a value chain model, which will enable small producers to team up with processors to increase productivity and profitability.

## National runner-up and Western Australian winner: Bev Logue.

Bev will enhance her business management, communication and negotiation skills, and her understanding of bio-diesel production.

**NSW winner: Kate Schwager.** Kate plans to take the Rural Towns Package,



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By Kate Filor\*

Martha believes a successful value-chain model could help bolster small farm profitability.

“There’s a tremendous number of small blocks of productive rural land on the periphery of urban areas that are too small to be profitable,” she said.

“One element of a successful value chain is that the collaborative approach could result in these small blocks being productive.

“That could make a real difference to communities and agribusiness.”

All that is a long way from the Brisbane TAFE course she took 10 years ago as a new Australian.

The former American wanted to familiarise herself with the landscape and environment of her chosen home but came away with much more.

“I thought someone must be doing something with all the native fruits and produce, but I found very little in the way of high quality consumer products,” Martha said.

“The fruits needed processing – they aren’t very yummy straight off the tree.”

With the seed of a business idea planted, Martha and David started work on their business eight years ago, planting more than 3,000 trees in their native orchard.

“We wanted to turn a profit and maintain a lifestyle – we weren’t looking to develop beyond that,” she said.

In her previous life Martha spent 35 years working in the food industry.

She worked as director of international operations with Mrs Fields Famous Brands, with responsibility for the company’s franchise network in 37 countries, as well as new product research and development.

She used those skills in developing gourmet products for her farm’s two staple fruits – *Syzygium fibrosum* and *Syzygium luehmannii* – and other native species they grow.

These lillypilly varieties yield fruits that Galeru have trademarked Raincherry™ and Rainberry™, which are used in the fruit sauces, gourmet baked goods and yogurt.

“We work with local processors and manufacturers – we don’t process ourselves,” Martha said.

But the farm’s success meant others were keen to follow its example and set up in the same mould.

“We aren’t terribly equipped to involve them,” she said.

“I would lie in bed at night thinking that these people might expect us to buy their fruit for processing.

“I didn’t know what we were going to do – we didn’t envision being a big entity and buying other people’s crops.”

Martha started looking for a business model that would accommodate more producers and allow economies of scale.

She was fortunate to learn of the value chain model at a meeting with The University of Queensland – Gatton’s Associate Professor Ray Collins.

“We believe value chains are a different type of business model for agribusiness that encourages innovation by primary producers and processors,” Martha said.

“Value chains work by focusing on meeting consumer needs with the highest value products. In this way, producers, processors and retailers are able to collaborate to create the greatest value for all.”

The \$10,000 bursary from the RIRDC award means Martha will research successful value chain operations, as well as some which have failed, to ensure development of a model which will best suit her group.

Her project will also include developing of financial and legal options for the value chain. She will write a report on her experiences for RIRDC in the New Year.

For more information on the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award, visit [www.ruralwomensaward.gov.au](http://www.ruralwomensaward.gov.au)

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an easy to use, cheap and user friendly web development programme, across the state to promote agriculture and attract tourists to regional areas.

**South Australian winner: Heather Baldock.** Heather plans to gain the knowledge needed to conduct a series of forums discussing genetically modified technology.

**Tasmanian winner: Heather Chong.** Heather will tour Canada and Ireland to investigate ways their summerfruit industries combat labour shortages.

**Northern Territory winner: Janette Hintze.** Janette will visit cut flower producers on the east coast to learn from their production and marketing practices and to improve packing techniques.

**Victorian winner: Yvonne Jennings.** Yvonne plans to develop a pilot programme to improve the capacity of rural women to contribute regionally. The programme will include opportunities for mentoring and individual support.