

GROWER PROFILE: MEET JAN & DENNIS CHANT

Dennis and his wife Jan currently operate a mixed farm called Warrina Park (a unique combination of 2600 Sweetheart passionfruit vines, Belted Galloway cattle and alpacas) close to Murwillumbah in northern New South Wales.

When you first meet Dennis Chant you would never imagine the interesting life that he has already had, and the incredible achievements he has under his belt. Dennis and his wife Jan currently operate a mixed farm called Warrina Park close to Murwillumbah in northern New South Wales. They originally purchased the passionfruit farm in 2004 and this was leased out to a share farmer for 10 years. They then made the permanent move to farming themselves four years ago. Along with 2600 Sweetheart passionfruit vines there are Belted Galloway cattle and alpacas - a very unique combination!

Dennis' professional career has included time spent in the aviation, maritime and tourism industries, both in Australia and internationally. Until his recent 'retirement' to full-time farmer, Dennis was a senior executive with the company that owns and operates multiple Queensland airports including Gold Coast, Longreach and Townsville. He has only recently given up his position on the World Governing Board of Airports Council International and as President of its Asia Pacific Region. He was also Chairman of Gold Coast Tourism and involved with both the successful bid for the 2018 Commonwealth Games and the organising committee for the games themselves.

So, I suppose the real question is why become a passionfruit farmer and how is that 'retiring'?
To confirm that passionfruit farming

was the best choice of crop, Dennis and Jan engaged a local consultant to do a review of what options were viable. Sugarcane and bananas were considered, but passionfruit came up as the best option. The property already had trellising infrastructure in place, so they carried on the passionfruit business at the farm and ran it adjacent to their other loves of specialist cattle and alpacas in the free paddocks. With Dennis's staged entry into retirement, the location also made sense because of the easy transport access from Murwillumbah to Sydney and Brisbane. It's a superb region for growing high quality purple passionfruit and the local passionfruit community have been very generous with both education and information for the couple. Dennis has also received a lot of information from the association and the guides that are available have been really invaluable.

When asked what he dislikes about passionfruit farming, Dennis openly states that there's nothing to dislike - it keeps you physically fit and your mind active - particularly with all the challenges of learning a new crop.

One really interesting insight that Dennis shared in his interview with Amanda is a lesson worth sharing. He and Jan purchased more land and planned to increase the size of their passionfruit plantings however they quickly worked out that bigger isn't always better. In fact, it can be far more profitable to focus on ways to improve your productivity and keep your farm size manageable.

Did Dennis have any farming heritage before he came onto the land?

Dennis is originally from Western Queensland and his grandparents had table grapes, plus he worked on a good old-fashioned sheep and wool farm in his school holidays. The lease opportunity that came along fifteen years ago gave them the entry point they needed into the perfect next chapter of their lives.

For Dennis, tractor work is absolute therapy after a lifetime spent working in offices and sitting in meetings, in fact, for the last 3-4 years farming has been his major hobby. And although they bought a motorhome with the intention of becoming grey nomads and seeing Australia, that doesn't seem to be happening anytime soon. The couple have overseas travel plans taking precedence this year; Cyprus and Hong Kong for aviation and airport conferences and a big trip to the UK to see their son who currently lives in London. That's my kind of retirement!

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It can be far more profitable to focus on ways to improve your productivity and keep your farm size manageable rather than increasing your farm size.

