

GROWER PROFILE: MEET LARNER & JUDITH SUGDEN-SMITH

Larner and Judith are a husband and wife farming team who grow passionfruit in Dimbulah, which is the gateway to the Hodgkinson Goldfield, first settled in 1876. Their vines are joined by a small herd of British White cattle and some retired thoroughbred horses. Interestingly, British Whites are one of the oldest breeds of cattle native to the UK.

Larner comes from a long line of farmers; his family were cane farmers at South Johnstone for many generations and Judith grew up on a cattle property. You could say that farming runs in their blood.

They have two older children who have now flown the nest, being far more interested in horses than cropping, although they did help out for the first couple of years. The farm is boutique at just 100 vines, but the infrastructure was all there when the couple bought the farm so they thought why not give it a go!

They grow Panama Red and a few Panama Gold on an interesting form of T-trellis. Like so many farmers, they get huge satisfaction from growing something that will end up on an Aussie breakfast table or someone's celebration cheesecake somewhere. They focus on trying to use

minimal chemical intervention although they are not certified organic. And like so many of us, Judith is horrified at the waste that unrealistic attention to skin blemish creates in our current market grading system. "There is nothing wrong with the fruit. Frivolous marks and spots create so much waste when really consumers need to understand that marked fruit is just as good on the inside," says Judith.

Sales from 100 vines are not huge, but they keep their operation lean and do most of the work themselves. "Grading the fruit is quite a therapeutic job," admits Judith.

The Sugdens do have some good tips for other potential growers; buy the Passionfruit Growing Guide before you get started, don't let more than one stem grow up the trellis in one spot and they wished they'd planted their first two rows closer.

It's always a good idea to try to talk to some existing growers in your area before you get started too.

What was life before passionfruit farming? Larner is also a qualified chopper pilot and he has done cattle mustering by chopper in the past and sometimes misses the adrenaline. Judith loves her horses and even offers horse therapy and pony rides at their property too.

The REGIONAL FIELD DAY on Wednesday 19th June is visiting Larner & Judith's farm so register to attend at:

<https://passionfruitaustralia.org.au/news/events/#levent/2019/6/19/far-north-queensland-regional-field-day>

