



MEET THE MAKERS

Home to roost

A change in lifestyle for one young family meant heading back to the family farm, to produce premium free-range pasture eggs.

Words Tracey Sunderland. Photography Shona Dey

Nestled in the lush green pastures of Wainui – a small rural town just a hop, skip and jump away from Auckland's North Shore – you will find husband-and-wife team Deonne and Dean Olliff, proud owners of Olliff Farm. While Dean's family has been farming this land since 1945, it was only in 2013 that Dean and Deonne decided to move back to the countryside, to give their children wider spaces to grow and roam.

In this small portion of land carved out from the larger dairy farm, this couple have successfully crafted a livelihood through eggs – not just any eggs but premium, free-range pasture eggs.

Over a morning spent with this enterprising couple, their three children, Beau (7) Archer (6) and Darla (2), and their flock of 1800 happy brown shaver hens, we discover why chefs in Auckland have been raving about these eggs, which now grace the kitchens of many highly regarded restaurants including Clooney and Daily Bread.

Dean and Deonne are part of a growing group of 'entrepreneurial farmers', who come into farming from other, often unrelated, professions. Dean trained and worked as an electrician while Deonne was a buyer for high-end surf and street wear with an international chain. They met at a festival in the UK during their OE and moved back to New Zealand in 2005.

While Dean has learned much from a family history of farming, the couple decided to set up their own farm on principles of modern, smallholding farming.

Moveable feast

Deonne and Dean's hens are kept in micro flocks of 350 to 400 that roam the green paddocks. Not only do they have ample outdoor space, these hens also enjoy a varied environment owing to their inventive accommodation in the form of chicken caravans.

Looking nothing like an ordinary coop, these specially designed caravans provide not only a sheltered, safe space for the hens but, equally importantly, access to a varied environment. When the hens have had enough of foraging in one spot, Dean simply hooks up a caravan to his trusty, small tractor and moves their home to a different part of the paddock. This regular change in environment enables the hens to forage a diverse range of bugs, grubs, seeds and fresh greens from pastures that are healthy and regenerated.

There is also a small herd of cows still on their land, which have been an ideal companion to the hens over the past three years. As Dean explains, "The foraging chooks love having their lawn 'mowed' by the cows, which means the vitamin D from the sun's rays can shine through to the grass roots and



Meet the makers

Who Deonne and Dean Olliff

What Olliff Farm

Where 438 Waitoki Road
RD1 Wainui
Silverdale, Auckland

olliffarm.co.nz



Left: Dean and Deonne Olliff with their children, Archer, Darla and Beau and their happy chooks. This page: You can pick up Olliff eggs fresh from the farm gate in Wainui, or head online for retail stockists.



Tip

Eggs lose nutritional value when cooked; try light methods of cooking such as poaching or soft boiling.



nourish the critters that live below. The hens love to rummage through the cow pats for little insects and, in the process, help spread nitrogen over the paddocks to fertilise it along with their own chicken poop". In addition, the cattle's manure works as a positive fertiliser for the land. It is a mutually beneficial relationship for both. This is perhaps the reason that Olliff eggs taste rich, creamy and extremely delicious.

Fresh is best

Dean and Deonne have a "four-day freshness" rule which sees their freshly laid eggs collected each day. They are hand graded and inspected for hairline cracks before every egg is stamped with their triple 'fff' logo and packed for delivery to restaurants and retail. The eggs are sold or delivered off the property within four days. Dean wryly mentions, "Some chefs have been known to 'skite' just a little on the menu about 'eggs that are laid the same day as they are served'."

While most of their eggs are personally delivered to their restaurant clientele, they can also be found in stores such as Farro Fresh, Naturally Organic and cafes. For those who live near Wainui, they can be purchased directly from the farmhouse.

Natural cycle

The youngest flock of hens starts laying from 16 weeks of age. The natural cycle of an egg-laying brown shaver runs to 18 months to two years. Then the feathery ladies are moved out to a nearby Dairy Flat farmer who specialises in rehoming them as pets in urban or rural homes.

As we watch son Beau comfortably pick up and hold a hen in his arms, Dean talks about their dream of being self-sufficient by 2020 and reducing their reliance on supermarkets for their daily food. Part of this is already in action in their community. Neighbouring farms with excess fruit, vegetables and produce operate a small community trading post in the town hall.

We eventually sit down at a table laden with their hand-raised, labour of love eggs, cooked in several different ways – their own family recipe for fresh Olliff egg wraps, followed by the surprisingly easy to make, and delicious, Kiwi eggs, and finishing off with decadent Portuguese tarts. **g**

Crispy Panko Kiwi Eggs

Serves 6. Ready in 45 minutes

7 free-range eggs
6 high-quality pork sausages
3 tbsp freshly chopped herbs,
a mix of parsley, thyme,
sage or marjoram
2 tsp Dijon mustard

¼ tsp ground or freshly
grated nutmeg
salt and pepper to season
½ cup plain flour
100g panko breadcrumbs
2 tbsp butter
1 tbsp olive oil

Put 6 eggs into a pot of cold water and bring to the boil, turn down to simmer for 5 minutes then drain into a colander and place into a bowl of cold water to cool down.

Squeeze the sausage meat out of the skins into a medium bowl, discard the skin. Add chopped herbs, mustard, grated nutmeg, and salt and pepper to season, and mix well. To shape the sausage meat around the eggs, measure out 6 equal balls of mixture and place onto a floured plate. Using floured hands pat each ball into a large oval shape between your palms (it should be roughly the size of your palm), place down onto a piece of waxed paper.

Preheat oven to 175° fan bake. Peel the eggs; wrap each flattened mixture around each egg and join to encase it. Dust each in flour all over and place in the fridge for 10 minutes.

Whisk the remaining egg with a pinch of salt (to make egg wash). Place the panko crumbs into a large bowl. Dip the eggs into egg wash then directly into crumbs, until they are all nicely covered.

Heat a large fry pan to medium-high heat and add butter and oil. Roll the eggs around in the pan to cover in butter and oil, panfry until starting to turn golden (5-6 minutes). Place into a baking dish and bake for 25 minutes. Let the eggs sit in the baking dish for 5 minutes to cool before serving or packing for a portable meal.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The colour of a hen's ear determines the colour of an egg. A brown shaver will produce a brown egg. Other coloured hens will have eggs the same colour as the inside of their ears.
- Egg protein contains eight amino acids and is one of the highest quality proteins available. The yolk of an egg is a major source of good fat and, while the colour can be affected by its feed, this does not indicate superior nutrition.
- An egg contains every vitamin except C. They are also one of the few food sources of vitamin D and are rich in phosphorus. This combination helps provide the body with the necessary building blocks for healthy bones and teeth.
- To test freshness, sit an egg in a cup of water. If it floats, it's old. Pasture-raised eggs contain more vitamin A, omega-3 fats, vitamin E and less saturated fat than intensively farmed eggs.

Portuguese Tarts *Makes 12 tarts. Ready in 1 hour*

350g frozen puff pastry sheet, defrosted (1 used Paneton Pastry)
1 tsp ground cinnamon
large pinch of ground nutmeg
80g caster sugar

Filling
180ml milk
100g caster sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 strip lemon peel,
(use a vegetable peeler)
125ml cream
3 large eggs, whisked
2 tbsp plain flour

Preheat oven to 220°C. Grease a 12-cup muffin pan well, with butter or non-stick spray.

Mix the cinnamon, nutmeg and caster sugar together. Unroll the pastry and sprinkle the cinnamon sugar over it. Starting at the long end, tightly roll up the pastry into a log and slice into 12 equal pieces.

Place the pieces flat on a board and roll them out into flat disks, big enough to fit into the cups of the muffin pan. The side should come up a little bit and form a cup.

To make the filling Place the milk, caster sugar, vanilla, lemon peel and cream into a small pot. Whisk in the egg and flour. Cook over moderate heat for 5 minutes, whisking constantly. Stir for another 5 minutes or until the mixture thickens and forms custard. Remove the lemon peel and pour the custard into the pastry cases.

Bake for 12–15 minutes until the pastry is cooked and the custard is speckled-brown.

Remove tarts from the oven to the stove top. Remove the tarts from the tin as soon as you can, use a blunt knife to loosen the edges. The base of the tarts will caramelize and turn to toffee in the tin so it is important to remove them quickly. If they become stuck, return the tray to the oven for a few minutes to melt the toffee and loosen again.

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For Olliff Farm's hot & spicy egg wrap recipe, go to good.net.nz

