

Ben Clinch

BEN CLINCH TALKS ABOUT GROWING UP ON A FARM AND EXPLAINS THE ETHOS BEHIND HIS BUSINESS, THE FREE RANGE BUTCHER

WHY DID YOU BECOME A BUTCHER?

I grew up on our farm and have been around animals and meat since I was young. We always slaughtered our own animals for meat back home, so I understood the basics of the trade from a young age. We have some great butchers working with us now so I keep learning when I'm in the coldrooms with them. I know what good meat is, and what makes great meat, and that all starts in the paddock. We are a true paddock-to-plate business and our customers give us the best feedback.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS?

We sell grass-fed and finished meat. Initially we supplied the meat from our own farm, but as we grew we realised that wasn't going to be sustainable, especially with the drought conditions at present. Our home town of Barraba is doing it fairly tough at the moment so currently we source meat mostly from the New England area. We specialise in pasture-fed pork direct off our own farm. We have our own smokehouse where we create our award-winning hams, nitrate-free bacon, chorizos and other smallgoods. We dry-age all our better cuts of beef for amazing grass-fed steaks and we only buy the best lamb from the best farmers who have an ethos such as ours.

WHERE CAN YOU BE FOUND ON THE NORTHERN BEACHES?

We have recently opened our Sydney HQ at Mona Vale to customers on a Monday from 2-3pm. Farmers' markets have been our mainstay for a number of years.

We do over 20 a month and are at the Beaches Market at Rat Park on Fridays and The Frenchs Forest Farmers Market on Sundays and we turn up rain, hail or shine. We also run a delivery service on the beaches from Wednesday to Friday.

WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE MORE INTERESTED IN PRODUCE THESE DAYS?

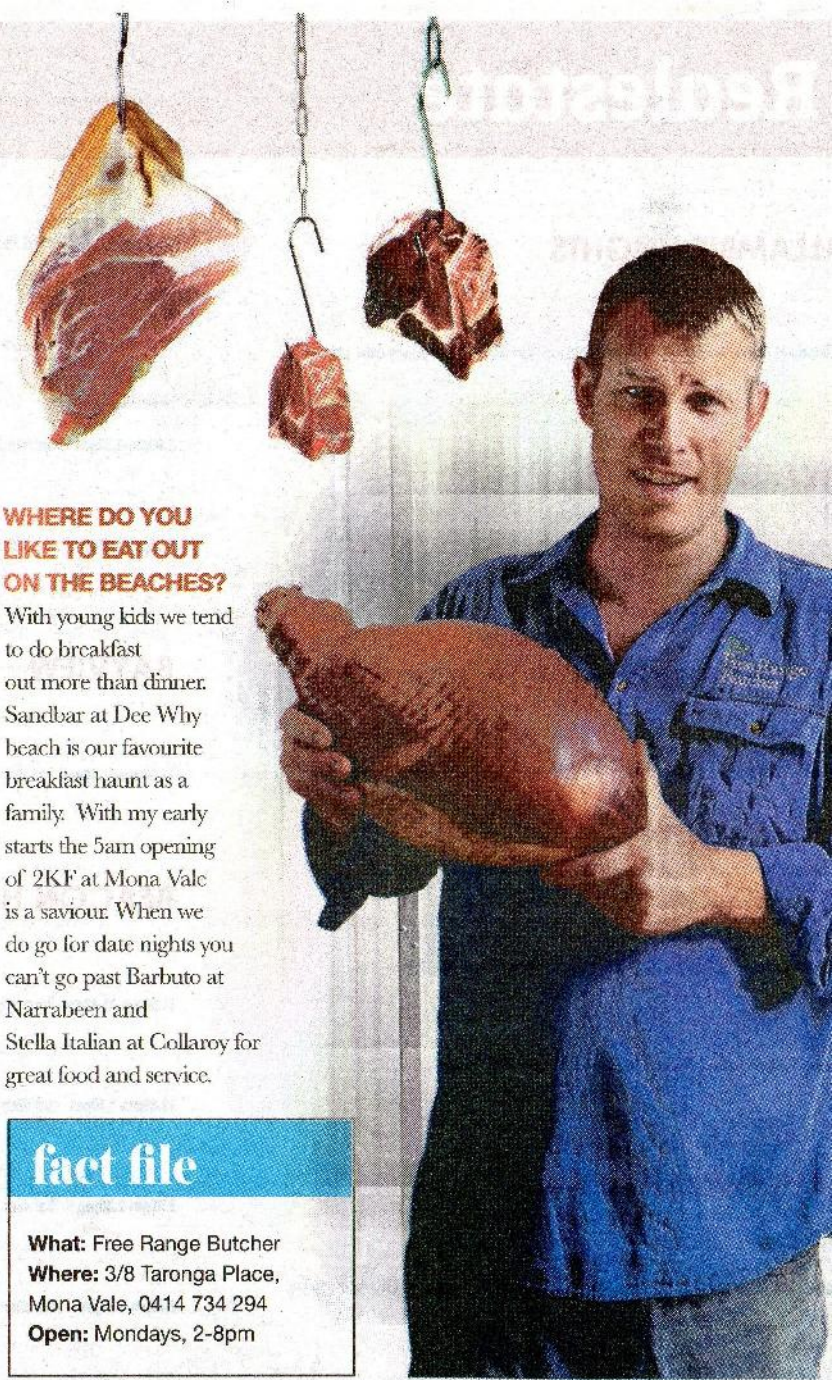
Cooking shows on TV have been the best thing since sliced bread for businesses like ours. Watching amateurs doing it well, or watching their mistakes, is a whole other lesson in cooking – far better than the one your parents taught you when you watched them at home – simply because of the wide variety of meals cooked during the shows. It gives people great confidence in their own ability, which then reflects directly into what they cook at home, or better still encourages them to cook more at home and prepare better meals for their families.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR A STRESS-FREE CHRISTMAS?

Order now. The worst thing about this time of year is the frantic pace we all get ourselves in. The last thing you want to do is miss out on quality.

WHAT WILL BE THE MEAT TRENDS IN 2015?

A southern style of cooking is gaining momentum. I think cooking big pieces of meat slowly with the use of rubs and smoke is a great pastime. Standing around coals has been done for thousands of years. Why should we stop now?



WHERE DO YOU LIKE TO EAT OUT ON THE BEACHES?

With young kids we tend to do breakfast out more than dinner. Sandbar at Dee Why beach is our favourite breakfast haunt as a family. With my early starts the 5am opening of 2KF at Mona Vale is a saviour. When we do go for date nights you can't go past Barbuto at Narrabeen and Stella Italian at Collaroy for great food and service.

fact file

What: Free Range Butcher
Where: 3/8 Taronga Place, Mona Vale, 0414 734 294
Open: Mondays, 2-8pm