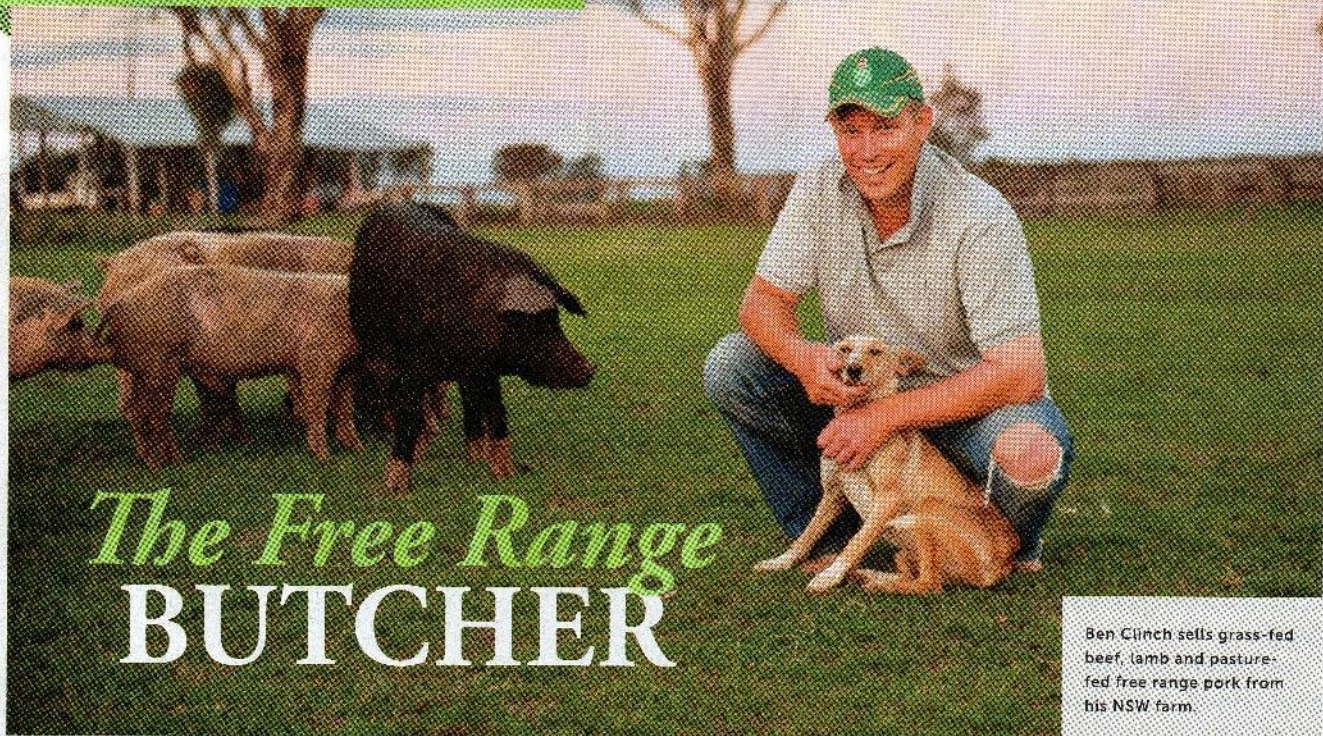


Producer profile



The Free Range BUTCHER

Ben Clinch sells grass-fed beef, lamb and pasture-fed free range pork from his NSW farm.

Ben Clinch from The Free Range Butcher explains to Danielle Chenery why farmers' markets beat shopping at supermarkets any day.

Farmers' markets have been rising in popularity for years now, and it's not hard to see why. Less food miles means the produce on sale is better for the environment, is fresher, in season and tastes amazing. You're outdoors, free from supermarkets' fluorescent lights and plethora of packaging. It's a win, win.

"Market shoppers get a fresher, better product, that will last longer once it's home," says Ben Clinch from The Free Range Butcher, who sells at Wahroonga Markets, Miller

Street Markets, Frenchs Forest Organic Markets and the Beaches Markets to mention a few. "It's not cheaper, but it's better value. It costs a lot for small producers to get to the markets but what they sell is the pick of the crop," he adds.

Then there's that unmistakably lively market vibe. "We're pretty noisy. We're out there spruiking, creating something nice to get a bounce out of the public. We love to see families shopping together and enjoy showing the kids our photos of the farm, so they can learn [where their food comes from]," he says.

The Free Range Butcher specialises in grass-fed, 28-day dry aged beef and lamb, pasture-fed free range pork, and free range poultry. Its produce is all supplied from its own farm, or other farmers they know, and all their meat is hormone and antibiotic free.

Ben's family's farm is located in the NSW district of Barraba. The meat he sells comes from free range animals - with animals

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in the open, feet on the ground, eating grass and sleeping under trees. His family decided to commercially sell their meat after eating a 'nondescript grain fed steak' at a fancy Sydney restaurant. They felt they had better steak sitting in their fridge at home. So, in 2008, they began formally selling their products. Initially the meat was processed in Barraba, but the majority of the processing now happens on the Central Coast, while distribution is managed from their warehouse on the Northern Beaches. As of 2016, the company operates at more than 20 farmers markets every month and now offers a next business day home delivery service.

Ben says the markets were a great place to start selling, and to test out their products. "It's a great place to meet customers and have conversations about produce," he says.

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The Free Range Butcher can be found at more than 20 markets every month.



"Having direct access to producers is important because, as a society, we are too far removed from our food sources," he adds.

"Market shopping is also a way to support rural farmers. We now offer our neighbours the opportunity to sell through us as we have grown out of our food supply. It offers them a different funnel to selling through the supermarkets," he explains. "Supermarkets give a false impression of food prices. They

can run their meat counter at zero per cent profit and, with their buying power, they can dictate back to farmers, which is a whole other issue," he adds.

"You can make shopping at the markets a family event that's a fun experience; not like at the supermarkets where kids are yelling for chocolates and chips. Shopping at the markets means you're more likely to come home with better food choices," concludes Ben. ■



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