

Macadamia pioneer branching out

► Richard Loader

New Zealand has a long history of growing macadamias and, according to a recent International Macadamia Researchers Symposium, New Zealand macadamias are well known as the biggest and best tasting.

Pioneering modern macadamia growing in New Zealand is Vanessa Hayes, who along with her partner Rod Husband, owns Torere Macadamias Ltd.

In 1983 Vanessa started researching macadamias with the vision of planting them on Māori land in Torere, in the eastern Bay of Plenty, about 20 kilometres out of Opotiki, right on the seaside.

Encompassing eleven hectares - two hectares on the seaside with nine hectares across from the highway - Vanessa is honoured to protect and care for this land inherited from her elders.

"I love macadamias and wanted to find the best varieties to grow on my land," says Vanessa.

"In the 1980s New Zealand imported three times more macadamias than it produced—it's the same today."

The first trials of New Zealand and Australian macadamias at Torere commenced in 1993 and in 2001 new varieties released in Australia were imported to add to the trials.

In 2002 Vanessa set up a quarantine facility, brought the scion wood out from Australia and built the nursery.

"The varieties grown in New Zealand at the time needed picking from the tree and had a higher sugar content and thicker shell.

"The newer varieties were high in oil with a thin shell and most importantly, they dropped to the ground. It was a great opportunity to import and trial high producing dropping varieties to replace New Zealand's lower yielding picking varieties and develop a new commercial macadamia industry for New Zealand."

"Initially I intended to supply other Māori land owners to replicate what we have done but it's very hard to develop Māori land commercially. I secured sole rights for the varieties and made them available to everyone in New Zealand."

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Torere Macadamias co-owner Vanessa Hayes - driving the industry's development.



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Torere Macadamias is a local whānau business committed to creating superior tasting products that are sustainably produced with a deep respect for the whenua.

At BDO Gisborne, our people value the importance of relationships and supporting our clients to achieve their dreams.

We have enjoyed the opportunity to work alongside Vanessa, Rod and their whānau, providing essential financial advisory assistance, as they continue to grow their business operations.

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Left, Vanessa Hayes checks plants in the new nursery extension which was funded by a PGF grant; right, Vanessa and Rod with macadamia plants ready for delivery.

Laying the groundwork

Kevin and Diane Taylor of Survey Gisborne Limited are proud of the long-standing professional working relationship they have established with Vannesa and Rod of Torere Macadamias.

When Vanessa first engaged Kevin Taylor to partition out her portion of land she had shares in at Torere, she set in motion a relationship that has now spanned 23 years. Working with the Wairariki Maori Land Court and the Otago District Council, the eastern Bay of Plenty land partitioned by Survey Gisborne became a nursery and orchard exclusively for Torere Macadamias.

“Viticulture and horticulture are an important industry to our local economy,” says Diane. “Our team at Survey Gisborne has assisted with the layout of several orchards including macadamia. There are many factors to consider when working out the layout for an orchard, including row orientation and tree spacings.”

For macadamia orchards, site plans are prepared that show the proposed layouts and their relationship to any legal boundaries. Diane explains that it is wise to engage a professional surveyor who has the expertise and equipment to coordinate the legal boundaries, as well as designing the layout and calculating the number of trees required.

Survey Gisborne Limited was founded in March 1999 by Kevin and later joined by Diane as co-owner in 2013—forming a

highly successful husband and wife team.

Today Kevin and Diane value the professional relationships they have established throughout New Zealand and beyond.

“We also value our small team of busy surveyors who undertake a wide range of specialist land surveying services including a mixture of rural, lifestyle and urban subdivisions, boundary redefinitions, topographic / site surveys, Maori Land partitions, occupation surveys and covenant surveys, to name a few.”

Based in Gisborne, the survey team covers an area from East Cape south to Wairoa and west to Otago.

During 2020 the key business focus has mostly been subdividing land for housing and undertaking Maori Land partitions.

“It’s fair to say that the services of licensed cadastral surveyors to undertake these legal types of land surveys are currently in extreme high demand. The demand for housing and sections in the Gisborne region has increased dramatically. The Covid-19 situation has seen many locals returning home where they can invest and enjoy a safer and richer lifestyle that is on offer in this region.”

Experiencing significant business growth and expanding its operation, Survey Gisborne is on the search for suitably qualified staff including licenced cadastral surveyors, passionate about surveying.



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Pioneer has vision for industry

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“The nursery grew gradually but we got really carried away in 2005/6/7 and orders started to really come in and we developed the nursery to full capacity with 10,000 seedlings.”

Then came the global recession in 2008, hitting Torere Macadamias very hard. Vanessa says while the full impact wasn't felt till 2011/12 it all but toppled Torere Macadamias.

“I also had cancer in 2012 and after a year's recovery called my family together and told them I didn't have the energy or resources to get the nursery going again.

“They needed to make a decision as to who would be willing to pick it up. My son, Walter, put his hand up, left his job and relocated back to Torere and started to regenerate life in the nursery.”

A five year business plan drawn up in 2013 established a number of goals including new website and branding and product development using nuts harvested from the few trees that had reached maturity, to generate income while Walter grew the nursery.

Achieving all the five-year goals by 2018 including selecting the best nine varieties, Vanessa developed a 10-year growth strategy to develop New Zealand's organic macadamia industry, approaching Plant & Food for research assistance and applying for financial support through the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF).

Awarded \$995,000 from the PGF, the allocation follows the three distinct components of Vanessa's visionary growth strategy.

Stage one is to grow the industry from the ground up by increasing plantings and developing training and grower education.

Allocated \$380,000, the funds are being used to expand the nursery including solar power and \$265,000 for classroom buildings and establishing a training programme.



New Zealand macadamias are well known internationally as the biggest and best tasting.

“In conjunction with the local polytech's horticultural unit I've developed a two year level 2 – 4 NZQA training course for growing macadamias.

“That course commenced September this year and at the end the students will be qualified macadamia orchard managers.”

The nursery has now been expanded from 10,000 seedlings to 50,000 annually.

Stage two is all about science and research to verify the nutritional value of the nine varieties of the macadamia trees and to see if there are any differences between them.

“We have three research projects running with Plant & Food Research for Pollination,

“We have a huge on-line presence for our macadamias. I develop the products that I love, using our Gisborne Farmers Markets for validation of the products.”

Early Crop Yields and Insect & Pest Tracking. A fourth project to analyse the composition of the nine varieties and develop NZ's own macadamia Nutrition Food label has just been applied for.

The third stage is to develop harvesting and processing facilities at Torere, a grower co-operative, and to establish an organic processing factory. The \$350,000 loan for this stage has not been uplifted by Torere Macadamias yet.

The funding from PGF is a real vote of confidence in what we are doing and has allowed us to implement the next three stages of our development, something we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.”

Vanessa's nine-hectare block across the road from the nursery has been progressively planted in macadamia trees with the final 1000 to be planted during 2021.

Of the existing 1500 trees, 1200 are harvested with the balance used as 'mother trees' providing the scions for grafting in the nursery.


Last year Torere Macadamias harvested 12-tonne of nuts, though Vanessa feels this year's harvest will be slightly down.

“We have a huge on-line presence for our macadamias.

“I develop the products that I love, using our Gisborne Farmers Markets for validation of the products.

“We also supply organic outlets around the country. Rutherford and Meyer, New Zealand's manufacturer of crackers, take about 50% of our volume.”

Perhaps in the future, we may see organic and natural New Zealand macadamias in a box with a kiwi on the front.



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Torere Macadamias supplies its products to organic outlets around the country.

Tools on the cutting edge

For Ian Adams, pursuing his lifelong passion for grafting has led to a highly successful business manufacturing a range of high quality grafting tools specifically designed for use in horticulture.

Having learned the ancient skill of grafting in his teenage years and spent many years working in the horticultural industry, Ian made the decision to specialise in grafting 15 years ago.

Awarded a major contract in Hawke’s Bay to whip & tongue graft 20,000 one year-old apple trees, Ian was convinced there had to be an easier way than conventional grafting knives allowed.

After searching the internet without success Ian designed and manufactured his own grafting tools and once he had tested them in his own business for a couple of years had the confidence to take them to the market, giving birth to Scionon Ltd in 2009.

Manufacturing a unique range of very high-quality grafting tools, within 12 months Scionon’s innovative GraftingSystems were selling right across New Zealand and into Australia.

Operating from his Hastings workshop Ian has blended his specialised grafting business with the design and manufacture of his suite of tools which are sold through local distribution companies as well as directly through his website <https://www.scionon.com>.

In 2016 Ian established a sister company, Scionon Europe, which is based in Verl Germany. Scionon is now represented by 20 different distributors around the globe.

“I’ve developed three main product lines,” says Ian. We have specialty grafting knives. All blades are fixed so they’re strong and suited to restructuring trees or starting new plants off. The second product is a hand-held grafting shear—a magic knife. Once trained, people can prepare five or six different grafting cuts with this tool. I can teach novices how to do what it takes a year or two for a skilled knife grafter to learn and they can do it safely. The third is a guillotine system for bench grafting where plants are grafted at the table so root stock and scion are united, stored or planted in the nursery later in the year. With this method we can short circuit the tree production time required by a year.”

Scionon tools and the innovative Scionon GraftingSystems have been successfully used to prepare pip-fruit, summer fruits, cane/vine, exotics, citrus, nuts, including macadamia and many ornamentals.

“We’re continually testing our tools on other plant materials and exploring more cutting options as horticultural industry needs become known. We think outside the box, we’ve broken the rules about grafting and I have come up with ideas that are proven to work.”



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