We began in 1983 with our first planting of 40 hectares of banksias. Today, we have a 60-hectare plantation of banksias, leucodendrons, leucospermum, Serruria and other assorted Australian and South African species. Serruria is part of the protea family and is a particularly important crop for us, as it is a high-value line with low freight costs and a strong capacity to sell. The demand for our mixed bouquets is also constantly increasing and is another major line for the business.

The farm is in production for twelve months of the year, closing only over Christmas and New Year, which makes our working lives full but also very fulfilling!

Growing the crop
The Serruria plants are grown in areas of the farm with deep soil, full sun and a high elevation. The whole area is deep ripped to 800 mm and then one tonne of an organic fertiliser and 100 kg NPK special blend.
Serruria is a long-lived plant so we replant every two years, with bushes removed after ten years. The plants come into production in their third year and the best blooms are in years five to seven. About five per cent of plants are lost every year; these are known as ‘born to die’ plants and are factored in to our planting schedule.

We use a fungicide to manage leaf disease twice a year and another is sprayed three times during flowering. Our biggest problem, especially this season, has been the roaming feral deer who love to nibble the flower buds – they have very expensive tastes! They also rub their antlers on the plants which entirely destroys them.

Serruria must be picked carefully; 75 cm of the stem must be left with healthy leaves or the branch will die. This is the single most important factor in keeping the bushes alive. We pick weekly from June to October. The flowers are picked when just a little of the bract is starting to open. The pickers prune as they pick and there is final tidy up of the plants in October. The same pickers harvest the entire crop and they do a great job. After picking, stems are watered, graded to length and bunched. They are then bucketed into plain water and stored in the cool room at 4 degrees. On dispatch they are packed carefully with the rest of the customer’s order and cooled.

Marketing and promotion
Our product is marketed at a fixed price through wholesalers in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide. We aim our production at a level that will not saturate the market; supply is usually much lower than demand. Occasionally, the market can be flooded by cheaper product which can sometimes affect our business. School holidays tend to slow the demand for all the flowers. If the demand slows we slow or stop picking, since the flowers can hold well on the bushes in the winter for about a week. By planting our blocks in different locations on the farm, the plants grow in different microclimates which alter their flowering times, and this gives us some control over availability. Our cropping begins with our original Serruria floridum variety and the season is extended by the later-flowering ‘Superb Blush’ variety.

Our solid reputation is the best promotional tool for our business. We supply every shipment with superior blooms, and this consistency is vitally important so that our wholesalers and their florists can always rely on receiving exactly what they ordered and the same excellent quality every time. We actively work with customers and our staff to ensure we meet the markets’ changing needs. Our website is also a valuable marketing tool for supplying details about annual product availability and images. Our bright, distinctive packaging with white and red boxes is easily identified in the markets.
Business challenges
The considerable distance between us and our markets and to
the main freight routes is one of our significant challenges. We
have developed very reliable freight partners, but the ever-
increasing freight costs remain a major challenge. Labour is also a
major cost and we find it increasingly difficult to find suitable staff
in our rural area. We operate for twelve months of the year, so
we rely less on seasonal workers than would some horticultural
operations.

Extremes of climate always present a challenge for a farming
enterprise. Excess heat and frosts cause problems for us, and
long periods of hot weather have caused burning to the
leucodendrons and banksias, although the Serruria have not been
affected. We no longer grow the species that are more sensitive
to the climate. Over time, we have identified the species that
grow well and easily for us, and this is a large part of the success
of the business.

Keys to our success
Our great customers and our relationship with them is a huge
feature of our success! Our goal is to offer desirable products in
amounts that do not oversupply our markets, and to offer total
consistency, reliability and top quality. The Banksia Company
brand promotes the value of consistent, top-quality flowers, and
this is a benchmark that we adhere to on a daily basis.

Our dependable staff are also a major strength. Since we sell our
product throughout the entire year, we have a permanent, well-
trained workforce that is committed to our standards of quality
and customer service. This is critical to ensure a smooth operation
and a united sense of dedication to the success of the business.

It is essential to constantly evaluate products, assess profitability
and adjust quickly to market demands. If we cannot make a profit
from a line, we don’t picket and instead just prune the product
off and drop it to the ground. If it shows no promise in the longer
term, the plants will be removed. Potential products must be
carefully analysed, and they must grow well and easily in our
location. It is not viable to expend resources on plants that just
don’t grow well for us.

At the end of the day, we love to grow our flowers and this is
what drives us on and provides us with a sense of enjoyment and
satisfaction. Cut flower production is too much hard work not to
make a profit! So the financial return is a necessary factor in the
day-to-day decision-making of the business. But when you get it
right, it is only one part of a complex and satisfying life in making
people happy with beautiful flowers.

Further information on the growing and post-harvest care of Serruria
florida can be found in the Quality Specifications for Australian Wildflowers
publication. This is available via the Rural Industries Research and
Development Corporation information website at rirdc.infoservices.com.au

Integrated Pest Management tools:
• Sticky traps
• Fruit fly controls
• Hand lenses

Biological control agents:
• Lacewings - general predators
• Eretmocerus - wasps for silver leaf whitefly
• Aphytis - wasps for red scale
• Trichogramma - wasps for moths and
caterpillars
• Chilocorus - ladybirds for armoured scale
insects
• Persimilis - predators for spider mites
• Montdorensis - predators for thrips and
whitefly
• Californicus - predators for spider mites and
thrips
• Spalangia - wasps for nuisance flies
• Cryptolaemus - ladybirds for mealybug

We are specialists in IPM
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