

# An Altered Marketplace

Everything changes and 2020 has been a year of immense change. While we lost some food businesses, some new ones sprung into view and some old ones adapted to a new format during lockdown. Some eateries that pivoted to producing ready meals have decided the new direction actually suits them better. Small specialized food businesses like bakers and coffee shops have generally done well, retaining their loyal customer base and growing new ones. The Queen Victoria market was on a trajectory towards a more slimmed down and sanitized food precinct long before COVID-19 hit, its heyday long gone, when it served as a major Melbourne fresh food hub. Then you could find stalls such as the one that just sold watermelons, stacked so high and deep the young lad working there would climb to the top of the mound and toss down melons to his machete wielding dad who deftly cut them in half with one blow. Other stalls specialized in selling just oranges or in the meat section there was a stall selling all kinds of offal, all the soft bits from nose to tail. That colourful chaos of the market has largely gone along with peoples fondness for brains and lambs fry. During the COVID-19 lockdown Melbourne farmers markets limped along, some doing quite well, others merging and relocating with reduced numbers of stalls. We missed some well known traders, like Bridge Farm and their fabulous asparagus. It is uncertain whether they will return. More and more of us have turned to online food shopping and it will be interesting to see if that trend as well as the enthusiasm for home cooking will endure. It has been a bit of a strange growing season too with some vegetables not making an appearance while some have been reduced in size, quality or with a shortened season. Extensive bushfires, lack of farm workers, fluctuations in export markets and the weather have all had a substantial impact. Despite this we may not see a lot of difference at the supermarket as Australia is a large

country with vast food producing areas in several geographic locations ensuring we nearly always have year round supplies. However, I have noticed some high prices in green grocers and if you are used to buying seasonal, local produce you may need to be more flexible. The loss of restaurant trade has meant that some specialty foods, like quail and game birds, will not be available until production ramps up again. On the bright side our Southern Rock Lobster is cheaper this year because of a halt in exports to China. After what we have all been through perhaps it's best that we concentrate on friends and family around us this Christmas and not fret about the menu. Well, maybe not as much.

Have a wonderful Christmas.

