



## “You can’t improve on nature”

—With many thanks to Mike Shipley

The Shipley's Farm motto 'Beyond Organic – Grass Fed' is a well-recognised brand in Albany. I wondered to myself "how does one go 'beyond organic' and don't all animals eat grass?" Mike and Barb invited me to their farm to see first-hand how their certified biodynamic food is produced.

It starts with the philosophy of healthy living. Mike and Barb have grandchildren and the last thing they want to do is feed them unhealthy food. Their commitment has led them to take action to provide their family and their community with access to tasty, nutrient dense, high quality, affordable food. Barb is also a health coach, empowering people with the knowledge and skills to confidently make decisions to benefit their long term health.

They have been farming since 2000, starting with an organic orchard in the hills on the outskirts of Perth. They moved to Albany in 2006, bought the first of their two farms in 2011 and started farming bio-dynamically in 2012. After 3 years of tirelessly practicing ethical animal husbandry and regenerative landscape stewardship and applying the principles of biodynamic agriculture, the Shipley's successfully achieved Demeter Certification.

Demeter certification provides the public with peace of mind that the produce from Shipley's Farm has been grown and processed according to biodynamic standards applied throughout the supply chain. This starts with the original animals bought from a certified organic stock supplier. In the feeding and breeding cycle the animals are entirely grass fed on a pasture without any pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers. Only rainwater is used on the farm for the animals and for all butchering processes. On the very rare occasion that sick animals require veterinary attention, these are quarantined and separated from the stock that are used for the Shipley's produce. The quarantined animals may be sold or used for breeding, but they will not be used for Shipley's products.

The Shipley's graze Wiltshire Horn (sheep) and Black Angus (cattle) over two adjacent properties in Torbay. Mike and Barb started with 40 certified organic cows and slowly bred up their stock to a total of 140 (of which 80 are breeders – female cows). They are slowly building up their stock (rather than buying the animals) with the aim of having a herd of 150-170 breeders. They source true free range, grass fed pigs from a neighbouring farmer for their pork products. Every two to three weeks, Mike takes his animals to a certified organic abattoir in Bunbury. He then returns to the Shipley's Farm Butcher Shop where all of the bodies are processed, packaged and stored in preparation for sale.

Shipley's Farm sells directly to the public from their well branded trailer at local markets. They also provide items to three local retail outlets. The products are popular and the farm sells all that it produces; sometimes acquiring additional animals from neighbouring properties to meet the demand. Shipley's Farm sells roughly 1.5 bodies of beef; 1.5 bodies of pork and 5 sheep each week.

Why are these products so popular? There are three key practices that distinguish the Shipley's Farm philosophy to maximise the quality of their products. One of the distinctions between Shipley's true free range products and other suppliers is in the diet of the animals.

The generally accepted definition of free range allows animals to graze on grass for a period of time before lot feeders or 'finishers' feed the animals grain to get them to size quickly. The animals look good but this finishing off process elevates the Omega 6 fats in the protein putting the ratio of Omega 6 and Omega 3 (which should be 1 to 1) out of balance. This can start a supply chain of unhealthy food – with more and more processing leading to a complete lack of nutrients. Shipley's Farm supplies true free range products because the animals are grass fed for their entire life-span. They never eat grain.



The second distinction is that Shipley's Farm uses a holistic grazing technique. The herd (or mob) of animals will be moved into each paddock 1 or 2 days then moved again. The farm uses a moveable solar powered electric fence to mark out the boundaries of the paddocks. The animals have access to water via a dam or moveable water trough that can be connected to buried water lines throughout the farm. The water trough is gravity fed from a rain water tank (water can also be pumped to the trough during hot weather).

The herd eats less selectively due to the mob pressure (competition for food), trample what they don't eat (e.g. weeds) and will fertilise the areas that have been grazed through their waste. This is a natural approach to weed and pasture management, avoiding the need to apply chemicals.

Once the grass is eaten down, the animals are then moved to another paddock. There is never any bare soil on the grazed paddocks. The ground cover keeps the soil cool and maintains soil moisture to maximise microbial activity (and soil health) and minimise the time to regrow the pasture. The holistic grazing technique also maintains the health and well-being of the animals. The animals remain relaxed and are curious at the presence of people, not scared or stressed.

Thirdly, Shipley's Farm select smaller framed animals to enable them to graze more animals and achieve more protein per acre (rather than the industry focus of more protein per animal). This ensures nutritious, healthy and tasty product for the consumer.

It takes time and a mindset shift to achieve a farming technique that follows nature. Discipline, elbow-grease and patience is required to avoid the application of chemicals (i.e. fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides). People see the romantic side of farming – the lovely calves, the great product. But they don't appreciate the hard work that goes into getting the

product to market. There are times when it's pouring with rain and they're moving the herd between paddocks.

There are the early starts and late nights getting the product to and from market and there is the constant quality control, testing, auditing to ensure the high standards are maintained, but the rewards are satisfying and oh so tasty. A simply cooked steak with a micro-herb salad containing all the vitamins and minerals for a strong healthy body.

*Article written by Ailan Tran  
Photography by Phuong Tran*

More information about Shipley's Farm, their philosophy and products can be found on their website [www.shipleysfarm.com.au](http://www.shipleysfarm.com.au).

The farm and butchers shop is located on 121 Thomas Road, Torbay, WA 6330. The on-site Butchers Shop is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays until 4pm. The Shipley's Farm trailer can also be found:

- **Wednesday 2pm to 6pm** at Oyster Harbour Store car park.
- **Friday 3pm to 5pm** during School Term at Golden Hill Steiner School Market (Denmark).
- **Saturday 8am to 12pm** at The Terrace Market on Stirling Terrace (near Home Hardware on Stirling Terrace).
- **Sunday 9.30am to 1.00pm** at The Boatshed Markets.

