

FROM PADDOCK

to plate

How the locals like it. **IGA**

Food is an important part of our everyday lives. Not only does it provide us with vital nutrients but it is a big part of our culture – some families might have “together” time over dinner, while others may get together for barbecues or roasts on weekends.

Whatever part food plays in your life, it is something that lands on your plate every day. It is, therefore, easy to take that

ritual for granted and forget the fact that a lot of work goes in to producing the food you eat.

So how does food actually get on to your plate? It's a tough question to answer so the *Sunday Mail* has recruited Don Ruggiero, one of the owners and operators of Swanport Harvest, to take us through how one of their products – Staycrisp Premium Lettuce – gets from paddock to plate.

Mr Ruggiero, who has had 38 years of experience growing lettuces, says that managing a lettuce farm is not easy because he has to work about 80 hours a week. But when you're passionate about it, it is all worth it.

“My Mum and Dad started the business when they migrated to Australia from Italy in the '50s,” Mr Ruggiero said.

“I grew up working in their glasshouses

and then gradually on the farm; I eventually took over the business from my parents.

“I've always loved working outdoors in the elements.”

Swanport Harvest Staycrisp Premium Lettuce goes through many steps, including growing, packaging on site, packing and distribution, before it lands on your plate. To make it easier to understand we've put together a simple flowchart.



DID YOU KNOW...

- Iceberg lettuce got its name from the fact that California growers started shipping it covered with heaps of crushed ice in the 1920s.
- Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the US, grew 19 varieties of lettuce in his garden at Monticello.
- The ancient Greeks believed that lettuce induced sleep, so they served it at the end of meals. The Romans continued the custom.
- All lettuce is low calorie and most of it is rich in calcium, iron and vitamins A and C.
- The darker green leaves contain the most nutrients.
- Lettuce is a member of the sunflower family.
- Lettuce is a vegetable that is pretty much immune to any form of preservation; you can't freeze it, can it, dry it or pickle it!
- If you want to start your own vegetable patch, Don Ruggiero says you'll need the following things: good soil, lots of organic matter to fertilise, consistent watering with low saline water and choose the right variety of lettuce seedling for that particular season.

SAN CHOY BOW

Serves four

What you'll need:

- 1 tbsp of peanut oil
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp ginger, grated
- 4 spring onions, chopped
- 500g pork mince
- 2 tbsps soy sauce
- 2 tbsps dry sherry
- 200g can water chestnuts, chopped
- 1 tsp hoisin sauce
- 1 tsp chilli sauce (optional)
- 1 tbsp coriander, chopped
- 8 Staycrisp Iceberg lettuce leaves

What to do:

- Heat oils in a wok and cook garlic, ginger and spring onions for two minutes.
- Add mince, stir fry for five minutes or until cooked.
- Stir in water chestnuts, sauces and sherry and simmer for three minutes or until slightly thickened.
- Remove from heat and stir in coriander. Serve in lettuce leaves.

THE BLT

Serves four

What you'll need:

- 250g bacon, rind removed
- 4 tbsp good-quality mayonnaise
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 8 slices organic white or grain bread
- 175g Staycrisp lettuce, shredded
- 2 large tomatoes, sliced
- 1 large avocado, sliced

What to do:

- Grill the bacon until crisp, drain.
- Combine mayonnaise and mustard in a bowl.

Farm-fresh: Workers pick lettuces on Swanport Harvest farm. **Picture:** Michael Marschall

STAGE ONE:

The farm - Swanport Harvest

Don Ruggiero says:

- After the lettuce seedlings have been planted, iceberg lettuce takes about six weeks to fully grow over the warmer months (spring/summer) and 12 weeks in autumn/winter.
- Swanport Harvest's Staycrisp Premium Lettuces are packed and vacuum-chilled within minutes of harvest. This means lettuces can be harvested and delivered to the market within 24 hours.
- Swanport Harvest is one of the very few places in Australia where lettuce can be grown all year-round. This is because the climate at the farm is ideal and the unique. For example, in the heat of summer we get the cool sea breeze off Lake Alexandrina. On some days there can be up to a 15C temperate difference between here and Adelaide, even though the farm is only 45 minutes away from the city.
- The packed, vacuum-chilled lettuces are then stacked into pallets before they are sent to the Adelaide Produce Market, where buyers can purchase the product.
- Swanport Harvest grows, packs and sells about four million Staycrisp Premium Lettuces every year!

Don Ruggiero says:

- Staycrisp is delivered to our wholesale store (Wildsalad) at the Adelaide Produce Market using our own refrigerated transport. It is unloaded, counted and checked for quality and temperature. It is then stored in our coolrooms and the lettuce that does not go directly to the supermarkets is sold off the floor to stores and providers when they come around to do their buying in the early hours of the morning.
- On average, Swanport Harvest sends 30 pallets of lettuce to Wildsalad, which would be around 11,520 heads of iceberg lettuce every day.

STAGE TWO:

The Adelaide Produce Market



Good to go: Jess Ruggiero and Frank Cittadini at Pooraka Farmer's Market, Pooraka. **Picture:** Jo-Anna Robinson

STAGE THREE:

The shop

- Staycrisp Premium Lettuce can be found at most supermarkets and independent grocers in South Australia and the Northern Territory.
- The lettuce can also be found at the Adelaide Central Markets at Stall 69. Stall 69 is run and owned by father-son duo John and Lee Bugeja – John opened the stall 36 years ago!
- Lee Bugeja says what he loves most about his job is dealing with the public, but there is a lot of hard work that goes in to running a fruit and vegetable shop. “The long hours is the hardest, I'm up at 3.30am five days a week,” Lee said. “There is a lot behind the scenes, including book work and all that kind of stuff.”
- Fruit and vegetable owners have to get up nice and early to source their produce so it can be purchased fresh.
- Lee says they love stocking Staycrisp Premium Lettuce because “it's a great lettuce and it lasts for a while”.

STAGE FOUR:

The plate!

- People from all over South Australia and the Northern Territory can purchase Staycrisp Premium Lettuce from supermarkets and independent grocers. Once it lands on your plate, it is up to you to eat it. Check out some of Swanport Harvest's favourite recipes:

CAESAR SALAD

What you'll need:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 3 bacon rashers, coarsely chopped
- 20g butter
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 3 slices bread, crusts removed, cut into 1cm cubes
- 1 Staycrisp iceberg or cos lettuce, torn
- 40g shaved or grated parmesan

Dressing:

- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 drained anchovy fillets

What to do:

- Heat one teaspoon of oil in a large pan over mid-high heat. Add bacon and cook until golden.
- Heat butter and remaining olive oil in pan. Add garlic and bread and cook until golden.
- Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.
- For the dressing: bring the egg to boil and cook for one minute. Drain and cool under cold running water.
- Crack the egg into a bowl. Place egg, oil, vinegar, mustard and anchovy fillets in a food processor and combine. Season with salt and pepper.
- Combine the bacon, bread mixture, lettuce and parmesan in a large serving bowl. Drizzle dressing and serve.

CAESAR SALAD



On display: Adelaide Central Markets Stall 69 co-owner Lee Bugeja with Staycrisp Premium Lettuces. **Picture:** Michael Marschall