



Glare Flower Farm



Barry, Margaret, Vanessa, Jamie and Alynah Glare pick ornithogalums at their Hopetoun farm



Margaret and Barry Glare prepare ornithogalums for Melbourne and Sydney markets.



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keeping water flowing

LIFEstory

Mallee flower business blooms with secure water supply

By Melissa Pouliot for GWMWater

If you can see past the glitter and glamour of Melbourne Cup celebrities rubbing shoulders in The Bird Cage, you might notice a white flower from the dusty hot plains of the Victorian Mallee providing the perfect backdrop..

Hopetoun farmers Jamie and Vanessa Glare and Jamie's parents Barry and Margaret are rapt to see their ornithogalum's grace floral displays in The Bird Cage. They've also enjoyed seeing them in a bridal magazine.

And it's highly likely you'll keep seeing their white bulbs for many years to come thanks to the peace of mind a secure water supply via the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline is delivering.

The Glare family chose to grow ornithogalums to complement their 1030-hectare mixed farm near Hopetoun because it requires little water over summer. But knowing they can tap into the pipeline supply when needed provided the impetus to pursue expansion plans.

"With the pipeline, we know we've got security of water if the years aren't with us and we don't get sufficient rainfall. To know that we can access pipeline water if we need to gives us real peace of mind," Barry says.

Ornithogalums are a perennial plant that grows from bulbs. They are native to southern Europe and southern Africa. The Glares grow the flowers under Plant Breeders Rights to guarantee their commercial markets in Melbourne and Sydney.

Barry describes them as a 'corporate flower' that are popular in big displays such as racing marquees and city office foyers. They are also popular for decorating wedding venues.

The flowers, which grow to about one metre, are hardy and long-lasting and can travel longer distances than other flower varieties without wilting. Frosts don't bother them and they are relatively disease and bug free.

Their main threat is hail but the Glares have installed hail mesh to protect them. The severe Mallee summer heat can be a 'bit harsh' but the Glares have a dripper-tape watering system to help them cope.

For the past two years they have delivered around 12,000 stems each year to the Melbourne Flower Market. The numbers depend on how many they can pick while they are at their peak. Barry says picking them in time is their biggest challenge because the only way to pick them is by hand.

Barry is no stranger to the impact of drought on farming enterprises, having lived through major droughts including 1967 and 1982 as well as the prolonged drought in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

He grew up on a mixed farm in the southern Mallee at Lascelles. Margaret, who has a horticultural background, is originally from Mildura. They spent 13 years in the Irymple district managing a small vineyard before returning to the Mallee to where they farm today.

They had a small piggery and grew vegetables for the Melbourne market but when the red tape got too much for their vegetables and the pig industry Barry says they started looking for a new enterprise with Jamie and Vanessa.

They wanted something that would only take a small amount of time, was able to handle harsh summer conditions, was unaffected by frost and most importantly, something that didn't need summer water.

When they started the ornithogalum business in 2009 the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline was almost finished. When Jamie first developed his business plan, he says they were more confident to start the new business knowing a piped supply would soon be available.

Jamie and Barry say the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline is one of the best things that has happened to the region.

“It’s such a good thing for the region. It certainly gives everyone with stock security but it also makes it possible to go into some of these smaller enterprises such as ours,” they say.



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Flower drippers used at the Glare Flower Farm



Barry and Jamie Glare picking ornithogalums.