

From silage to secret pathways: Maize gazing brings tourism to Tasmania

The Land

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Amazingly intricate pathways chopped out of a paddock of silage corn render themselves into an image of a Tasmanian cycling legend, at this farm near Launceston.

A Launceston farmer has diversified down the path of tourism, creating a maze out of maize.

It is a seasonal thing and this year's offering, to open on February 24, is a massive image of Tasmanian cycling legend, Richie Porte, leading a peloton up the French Alps.

It was designed in the United Kingdom, by a specialist graphic designer, where maize gazing is a big thing. There are 70 such creations in that country, sprouting up across farmland over the past two decades – since global positioning became an affordable service.

In the UK and the US there are maize maze societies and these proved helpful when Rowan and Anna Clark took this particular path of agri-tourism, four years ago.

The venture started slowly but has expanded to the point where last year's annual attraction brought 4500 visitors through the farm gates.

At \$15 a head that's not chicken feed and more than makes up for the 15 per cent loss accrued when Mr Clark drives a zero-turn mower into his maturing crop of silage corn.

For the five week season engagement is "very full-on". The couple bring in a hatted chef from "down the road" to supply cafe meals. Toilets are hired and delivered, along with staff to prioritise parking.

Kids can play in the hay – one little one wouldn't go home when called and wedged his body tight between two bales – and there is a farm vegetable garden where people can pick pumpkins, sweet corn, peas and potatoes all as part of the entry price.

"Sometimes vegies run out and people can get cranky," admitted Mr Clark. "But generally they enjoy it. Everyone leaves happy."

The current offering is the Clarks' fifth "crop maze" and this one took Rowan eight hours on the mower to precision chop a track through the four hectare paddock. A blown tyre, parted fan belt and fuel deprivation issues didn't help and he finished about 2am.



Heritage variety forage maize dwarfs Rowan Clark in his maze paddock near Launceston.

Now there are just five precious weeks to view the maze before the maize is chopped into silage and "pitted". Some goes to the Clark's flock of ewes and their prime lambs. Most of the silage is sold to dairy cows in the district.

Prior to planting – 250mm rows at 35,000 seeds/ha – the soil is well fed with 400kg/ha potato mix (12N:14P:16K), 250kg/ha DAP and 340kg/ha 50/50 mix of urea and potash.

The resulting silage, wet weight, delivers at 50t/ha or 180 tonnes from a 3.5ha paddock. with the maize maze gobbling up nearly 30 tonnes of feed.

“Now that we are in our fifth year it has become more about the visitors,” Mr Clark said, dismissing the suggestion of a loss. “At the moment it’s about 50/50 tourist dollar versus crop dollars but we hope to bump that up to 60/40.”