

Sweeter Banana Co-operative



Champion:

Doriana Mangili

Age of co-op:

Eighteen years

Industry:

Bananas

Location:

Carnarvon, Western Australia

Region:

Coastal town, 900 kilometres North of Perth: where desert meets ocean. A unique environment for growing the sweetest and tastiest bananas in Australia.



The Sweeter Banana co-operative was formed by a group of growers in 1993. The idea was to develop a recognisable brand so that Perth consumers could identify and purchase their banana of choice, the Carnarvon Sweeter Banana. The co-operative is owned and operated by 25 farmers all on family run farms on the banks of the Gascoyne River. Farming together funded Sweeter Banana in 2018 to undertake a feasibility study to expand their business operations.



The Catalyst for Change

- The industry had contracted to a point that it had halved in numbers.
- The contraction was the result of competition: larger tropical QLD banana was preferred over the smaller and less perfect Carnarvon banana.
- Growers were getting less return than their outlay costs.
- The industry was about to collapse, and growers knew a change was needed.



Opportunities

- To form a co-operative to promote their banana's point of difference.
- A marketing association was established in 1993 to create the brand.
- The co-operative was formed from the original marketing group in 2002 when the central packing shed was founded.

Challenges

- Developing trust: ensure you have a similar vision, understanding and clear, effective communication. Are you in it for the same reasons? Are you wanting to achieve the same results?
- Capital investment: putting money into something 'unknown'.
- External influences: people have a vested interest in growers being divided.

Success Story

- Five years ago, the region was hit by a cyclone and every single crop was destroyed. It took 18 months to return. Without the co-operative it could have been the end of the industry.
- A vertically integrated Co-operative that represents 18 growers and 60% of banana production in the region.
- Manages between \$8 - \$10 million of turnover each year.
- Moved from selling 100% of products on the market floor for unknown price and market, to today, where 90% of their bananas are sold to direct markets and packed to order.



“Build trust and strong relationships in the group. Your group decides: don't let outsiders get in the way of your vision!”

Doriana Mangili, *Business Manager, Sweeter Banana*

Other hot tips or advice

- Foster greater resilience through 'strength in numbers'.
- Enable each person to focus on their strengths and therefore enact authentic collaboration and growth. Farmers can focus on growing and others can work other parts of the supply chain.
- Having clear, concise visions and goals that all co-op members are involved increasing to ensure everyone is in it for the same reasons.
- Keep developing relationships: the stronger the relationship, the less opportunity for external influences to get in the way.

Future Looking

- **Talk to others in the region and or in your industry.** What are the barriers to success? How could a collaborative model improve your return and resilience?
- **Look for opportunities to value-add.** What could you do to enhance and build the financial opportunities for your business or collaboration?
- **Work together.** Once established, how can you continue to deepen and strengthen your relationships and your group?