

produce

the origins of...

bananas

After 70 years of growing bananas in the Queensland town of Caboolture, the Lindsay family has lost none of its passion for this highly nutritious, energy-giving fruit, says **SALLY MOLONEY**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAY CASH



Travel to the end of any dirt track in Caboolture, near Brisbane, and you're certain to find a Lindsay family member growing bananas at the end of it, or so the local saying goes. The street signs themselves are testament to the family's imprint on the area – there are numerous Lindsay Roads, Avenues and even a Lindsay Gardens nearby. Venture further north and you'll come across more Lindsays growing bananas around Tully, Queensland's banana heartland, or acting as brokers at the markets.

With a history spanning 70 years and four generations, bananas are in the Lindsay blood. It's a tradition that the patriarch of the family, Frank Lindsay, now aged 76, recalls with fondness and pride. "My family moved here in the early 1930s," he says. "There were nine boys and three girls – the girls stayed at home and all the boys worked on the property. We all worked for nothing, but life was great." While Frank's brothers went on to establish their own plantations in the area, Frank took over the original Lindsay plantation in Caboolture and has lived and worked on the property his whole life. "I love the work. They'll have to carry me out of here in a box," he laughs.

The day-to-day running of the 200-hectare plantation has passed from Frank's son Greg, and now rests with his grandson, Kurt. At 24, Kurt is not only the youngest member of the Lindsay family, he's one of the youngest farmers in the area. "This is my office," says Kurt, as he guides his four-wheel drive up the steep, rugged track that leads from the homestead to the plantation-lined hills. With views towards the imposing Glasshouse Mountains and Sunshine Coast, it's a pleasant, if somewhat treacherous, commute that Kurt begins before dawn each morning.



This page, from left: Kurt Lindsay carrying bananas; Frank in the packing shed; Greg with one of the hibiscus he grows on the property. Opposite page: Frank's family portrait.

Seven days a week, at least one member of the family will be tending to the banana plants (the Lindsays are quick to point out that the banana plant is in fact a perennial herbaceous plant, not a tree). The banana is one of the most labour-intensive crops, especially for the Lindsay family, who employ no staff and are forced to carry out many of the tasks by hand. Unlike their counterparts in north Queensland, whose flat plantations can be mechanised, banana plants in the sub-tropical Caboolture area are grown on hills in order to keep fruit above the frost line in winter. Using tractors and sophisticated machinery is out of the question, so between new plantings, spraying, fertilising and harvesting, there's always work to be done. "You're a liar if you say you're a banana farmer with nothing to do," laughs Kurt, whose day routinely ends after dark.

This lack of mechanisation limits production levels. With many other farmers throwing in the towel in recent years, the Lindsay plantation is one of the last surviving banana plantations in the area. At only a few hundred tonnes per year, the Lindsays' output makes up just a small fraction of the 260,000-tonne Queensland banana industry, which comprises 80% of Australia's total banana production. "It's a lifestyle," comments Kurt. "You'll never be rich from it, it's as simple as that." But you'll hear no complaining from the Lindsay household, especially from Frank, who believes "we've got everything we could ever want".

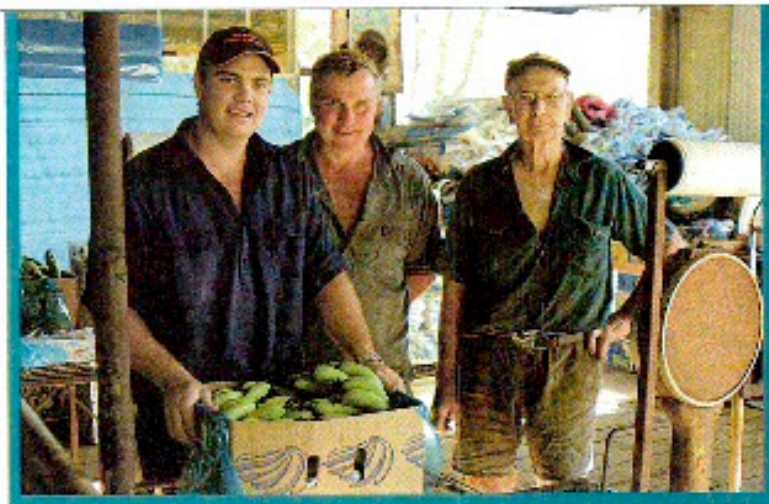
Banana growing seems to be part of the Lindsay family's genetic makeup and all three of the generations share a good-humoured, down-to-earth attitude that has seen them through the ups

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and downs of an industry that is susceptible to both nature's whims and market forces. The current concern occupying Australian banana growers is the threat of banana imports from the Philippines, which would push prices down and potentially introduce harmful diseases.



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"There are about four or five diseases that are really bad and they're all endemic in the Philippines," explains Greg. While the issue is still the subject of a government inquiry, the Lindsays believe importation is inevitable. "It'll happen in my lifetime, for sure," says Kurt with a hint of sadness. "It'll be the end of us all – we're just not going to be able to compete."

Add to this the problems of severe drought, rising production costs and an oversupply in the market, and you've got an industry fraught with challenges. The plantation has already confronted the prospect of closing, when a knee injury forced Greg Lindsay to make the tough decision to stop farming in the early 90s. He has since found success with a new business breeding and growing hibiscus on the property.

Kurt, however, is realistic about the fate of their banana plantation. "I'll be the last one," he says. "That's a sad thing, but it's the truth. We've lasted a long time, but you've got to move on. It's a different world we live in." Despite the challenges they face, the Lindsays wouldn't have it any other way. "I'd do it all over again," Frank says proudly, which is met with a resounding chorus of "we've got no regrets". And they only have to pull out the street directory to see that they've made their mark.

Banana & Pecan Meringue

\$1.02 per serve

Serves 4-6

Prep time 5 minutes

Cooking time 25 minutes

- 4 bananas, peeled and sliced
- ¼ cup (60ml) maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 4 eggwhites
- ½ cup (110g) raw sugar
- ¼ cup (30g) finely chopped pecans

1. Preheat oven to 200°C.
2. In an ovenproof baking dish, combine banana, maple syrup, lemon juice and nutmeg. Bake for 10-15 minutes, until bananas have caramelised.
3. In a clean, dry bowl, beat eggwhites with an electric mixer until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, until it dissolves and foam is firm, thick and glossy.
4. Fold half of pecans through meringue mixture. Pipe or spoon meringue on top of bananas in baking dish and top with remaining pecans. Bake for another 5-10 minutes, until meringue is firm and golden. Serve. ☺

