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Michelle answers the call of the land

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GREEN THUMB: Michelle Coelli loves being in the vineyard at Twisted Gum Wines.

Linden Morris

FOR one female Ballandean farmer, working the land is more than just an income.

It is a way of life, a mind set, a passion and a personal dream.

For Michelle Coelli the outdoor office of Twisted Gum Wines is the perfect place to live and work.

Our vines are dry grown, with no irrigation, and we only use the fruit from our place to make our wine.

"We moved here in late 2007 and this will be our sixth vintage," Mrs Coelli said.

"This is my comfort zone and it is like I have returned home again."

The wife and mother of four said she loved the land and would not want to leave.

"I grew up on the land in a small town called Killabakh in New South Wales where my parents had a dairy farm," she said.

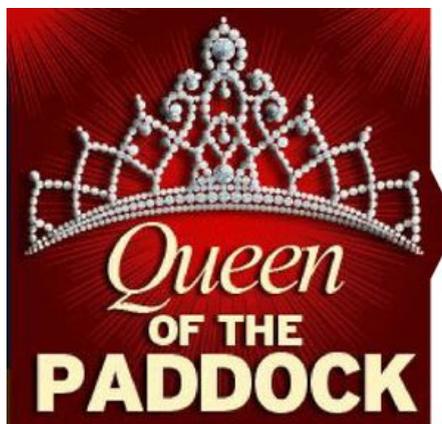
"I used to follow my dad around everywhere, started doing the milking on my own and developed a real love of the land.

"From there I went to uni in Armidale to study rural science."

Mrs Coelli said it was a shared love of the land that brought her and husband Tim together.

"I met Tim at uni and he had come from a farm in Wagga Wagga and was studying agricultural economics," she said.

"For both of us, our hearts belonged to the land.



"When I went to uni I knew I wanted to do something with agriculture but having grown up on a farm I was scared of relying on agriculture for an income.

"So together we spent 20 years working mostly in university agriculture departments."

Eventually the call of the land became too much for the couple.

"This property came on the market at the right time and it was the right price for us to take it on," she said.

"Tim has always loved and appreciated fine wine, which is why we decided to give the existing vineyard a go.

"It has been a steep learning curve but is just so rewarding."

Mrs Coelli said at the end of the day they cared about what their farming practices did to the land.

"Everything we do is with minimum impact on the environment," she explained.

"Our vines are dry grown, with no irrigation, and we only use the fruit from our place to make our wine.

"We have also done two things to give us the best shot to be sustainable.

"We not only grow our crop but make the wine too and have diversification with the cottage and are now building a cellar door so we can also sell our wine."

Mrs Coelli said she had embraced balancing working in the vineyard with watching her children grow up.

"When the kids were young I was a stay-at-home mum and worked very part-time," she said.

"The amount of work I do in the vineyard now I wouldn't have done with a young family but the kids are old enough to help out now.

"My day still starts with getting the kids off to school but then it involves jobs in the vineyard like pruning, replanting or harvesting and then there is paperwork, brochure design and I am also on the Small Winemakers Show committee and help organise the vineyard walks."

Just like other farmers, the duo has had their ups and downs when it came to their three hectares of vines.

"One of the biggest challenges we have had is bringing the vineyard back to where it is - we managed to establish some 500 vines without irrigation," she said.

"We were lucky that we had a couple of wet seasons at the right time to help out.

"We have also had so many successes - all the little ones add up to something big.

"Our wines have performed well at shows and it is great when people enjoy them and agree.

"I have learnt from experience that you should never be afraid to ask questions to learn and develop."

Bush Telegraph



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