

# Focus

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**Plum job:** Gaethan and Nicole Cutri have found rewards for swapping their city careers for Gaethan's parents' stone fruit farm, near Shepparton.

Picture: ZOE PHILLIPS

## The pick of the bunch



By LESLIE WHITE

GAETHAN and Nicole Cutri are examples of the new generation of farmers — those who return to the family farm from the city educated, professional and successful.

The couple left careers in Melbourne to work at Gaethan's parents' stone fruit operation

near Swan Hill. The business sells peaches, nectarines, apricots, plums and cherries.

And the move has paid off as the Cutris scooped the pool at *The Weekly Times* Farm Business Awards last week, winning horticultural producer and overall farm business of the year. Gaethan, 31, also took out the young farmer of the year title.

"We were shocked," Gaethan said.

"Some of the businesses there ... it was amazing to be judged in the same league as them."

Gaethan has degrees in law and commerce and practiced as a commercial litigation solicitor for four years at major Mel-

bourne firm Chambers Westgarth. He was also a triathlete and cyclist of some note.

Nicole, 29, has degrees in journalism and Spanish and previously worked as a media adviser to a government agency.

Gaethan brought to the operation his management skills and strong faith in procedures and

systems, which he has applied to the farm and the management of the business.

Nicole has adapted her experience in dealing with people to her running of the packing shed and her media savvy to helping create the brand image. She has lodged successful applications for business grants and

keeps a close eye on certification processes.

Gaethan's father Dom provides the hands-on experience — his involvement in the industry dates back almost 50 years to when, as an eight year old, he negotiated deals on behalf of his father and other Italian growers who spoke little English.

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### Enter to win \$10,000 in The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards

The Weekly Times Farm Business Awards cross all agricultural sectors. The Awards recognise producers that use innovative business practices to maximise the productivity and profitability of their enterprise.

Presented by The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, the following Awards are open to farmers from Victoria and the Riverina district of New South Wales.



Each Award winner will receive \$3,000 cash, with an additional \$7,000 awarded to the Farm Business of the Year. For entry information, contact the RAS on 03 9281 7444, go to the website [www.rasv.com.au](http://www.rasv.com.au) or email [farmbusinessawards@rasv.com.au](mailto:farmbusinessawards@rasv.com.au)





# Gaethan plucks fruit of

By KATE DOWLER

A FARM boy who turned his back on a high-flying law career to run his family's fruit business scooped the pool at *The Weekly Times* Farm Business Awards last week.

Gaethan Cutri and his wife Nicole are part of the new breed of educated young professionals who have chosen farming as their future.

The Woorinen family took out to major gongs at the Farm Business Awards last week, winning horticulture producer and overall farm business of the year.

And Mr Cutri, 31, also took out the young farmer of the year title.

He was up against some tough competition, including another young couple, Penny and Nathan Craig, from Nalda Pastoral Company at Apsley in the state's west, who took out the crop producer of the year award.

Mr Cutri said his family was "shocked" at winning the three awards, considering the quality of the other businesses they were up against.

And while the young couple decided to move back to the country and the family business because of the better lifestyle it



**A cut above:** *The Weekly Times* Farm Business of the Year winners (from left) Dom, Connie, Gaethan and Nicole Cutri.

offered, Mr Cutri said things had not worked out to be as quiet as he hoped.

Getting a better balance between work and family life was something he aimed to improve on in future.

His father Dom, along with his wife Connie, also accepted

the award, saying their son's energy and ideas kept them "well and truly worn out".

Winners and finalists such as the Cutris and the Craigs rubbed shoulders with the who's who of agriculture at the awards lunch, including Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke, his Victor-

ian counterpart, Joe Helper, as well as state Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu and Melbourne Lord Mayor John So.

Each category winner in the awards received \$3000 and the overall winner took home \$7000.

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**Leading the field:** Genetics Australia chairman Colin Gardner (left) with dairy winner Bill Bodman.



**Another way:** RAS chief executive Mark O'Sullivan (left) with alternative category winners Julian and Dianne Benson.

## ►► FARM BUSINESS AWARDS

# family business success



## BEST OF 2007

### ■ The Weekly Times Farm Business of the Year

Cutri Fruit, Woorinen

### ■ Department of Primary Industries Young Farmer of the Year

Gaethan Cutri, Woorinen

### ■ Bayer CropScience Horticulture Producer of the Year

Cutri Fruit, Woorinen

### ■ Case IH Crop Producer of the Year

Nathan and Penny Craig, Apsley

### ■ Genetics Australia Dairy Farmer of the Year

Bill and Janie Bodman, Won Wron

### ■ RAS Beef Producer of the Year

Peter Kirk, Tallangatta

### ■ RAS Alternative Farming Producer of the Year

Julian and Dianne Benson, Coorimunglie

### ■ Rural Finance Sheep Producer of the Year

Tim Paulet, Toongabbie

### Happy day:

Cropping winner Nathan Craig with CASE IH representative Brendan Magee (right); Rural Finance chief executive Dugal Graham presents the sheep award to Tim Paulet (below right); and RAS president John Fox presents Peter Kirk with the beef award (below).



Tony Bourke



Joe Helper







**Expanding:**  
Gaethan and  
Nicole Cutri on  
the family farm.

# Cutris the pick of the bunch

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According to Gaethan, his mother Connie "keeps everyone else sane".

The farm's planted area has grown from 120ha three years ago to 160ha today.

There are plans for further plantings.

The business employs

six full-time staff as well as more than 70 others during picking season.

Gaethan has set up key performance indicators to cover most areas of the business — from pruning to irrigation, there's a system for everything.

He records the number of fruit taken from each branch on each tree, the health of each tree, has a formula for pruning which stipulates the number and length of lateral and vertical branches on each tree, and documents everything.

"Dad is passionate about every tree, my passion is about developing systems and processes for a fantastic business as well as a great farm," Gaethan said.

"Previously the focus was on being a great farmer — Dad is a great farmer — I'm aspiring to move us to be a great business."

Gaethan credits the success of the Cutri business to his mother and father, who "did the hard yards".

The business focuses on large plantings of each variety with longer rows for ease during harvesting.

Soil is delved in between the rows and placed under the trees to increase the amount of topsoil.

The lowered area in between rows encourages any frost to settle there rather than under the trees — though even that doesn't occur often because Dom installed a frost fan from overseas a decade ago.

Dom, the first president of both Summer fruits Australia and the Victorian Stone fruit Industry Association, had also planted white nectarines before they became popular.

Gaethan acknowledged the current difficulties facing the stone fruit industry.

"The industry is at the lowest point it has been in at least a decade and it will get worse in the next year or two," Gaethan said.

The high Australian dollar and drought would

continue to hurt the industry, he said.

While these issues had slowed the growth of the business, Gaethan said the stone fruit industry was "unique" and was in a much better position to move forward than other horticultural sectors.

After the Taiwanese market closed, Cutri focused on Hong Kong, which now takes 40 per cent of produce.

Coles accounts for nearly half of all sales with Woolworths 10 per cent.

"Lots of people can grow perfect fruit; it's about doing that on a scale with systems and processes so you don't have to be there every minute," Gaethan said.

"Working as a solicitor made me write everything, there's no guesswork ... science instead of feel makes it lots easier."

Gaethan said the chal-

**6 My passion is about developing systems and processes for a fantastic business as well as a great farm**

lenge was to document his father's formulas — which exist only in his head — so that if Dom leaves or retires, Gaethan and family can continue to run the business.

Meanwhile Gaethan refuses to accept farming has to be a seven-day job.

"My goal is for no one to have to work a sixth day," he said.

"Though currently we've got incredible staff, we're very lucky in that respect."

"We probably haven't got the work/life balance right yet, hopefully the processes will set us free."

"We'll work on the business rather than in the business."

## Create a healthy environment for your local creek

If you own or manage a waterway frontage on your property, you may be eligible for a Melbourne Water grant.

Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program (SFMP) provides grants to help landowners create a healthier environment for their local waterways. Grants are now available for:

- Fencing
- Weed control
- Off-stream stock watering
- Revegetation
- Maintenance of existing SFMP projects.

To be eligible, you need to live within the Port Phillip and Westernport region

(Werribee, Maribyrnong, Yarra, Dandenong, Westernport and Mornington Peninsula catchments) and own freehold waterway frontage or manage licensed Crown land water frontage. Preference is given to frontages of greater than 50m on priority rivers and creeks.

To apply for a grant, complete an expression of interest form available on Melbourne Water's website at [melbournewater.com.au](http://melbournewater.com.au), or call the Stream Frontage Management Team on 03 9235 2231.

Applications close Friday 28 March 2008.



## The Farmer's Family Lawyer Geoffrey McNaught

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Growers back 2010 mulesing deadline

## Stand firm

By DAVID MCKENZIE  
and XAVIER DUFF

WOOL GROWERS have rejected a call for an immediate ban on mulesing and re-affirmed their commitment to a 2010 deadline to outlaw the controversial practice.

The NSW Farmers Association last week broke ranks with the wool industry's 2010 commitment, creating uproar in the industry by calling

for an immediate ban in the wake of growing retailer opposition to mulesed wool.

The association called on the Sheep and Wool Industry Task Force to consider "immediate cessation" of mulesing as a "way forward" in addressing serious boycott threats in overseas wool markets.

The call came in the wake of news that a growing list of European retailers is no longer prepared to wait for the 2010 ban because of fears Australian wool growers were not serious about meeting the deadline.

WoolProducers Australia president Don Hamblin, who recently returned from Europe, said several retailers and manufacturers were already refusing to buy product made with mulesed wool and up to 60 were considering a boycott.

NSW Farmers Association president Jock Laurie said the threat to Australian wool sales was too great to wait for 2010.

If retailers were not confident Australia would stick to a 2010 ban on mulesing the only way to resolve it was to ban it now, he said.

"Having Australian wool being boycotted is a serious issue and potentially devastating for the industry," Mr Laurie said.

"We understand that you need to deal with the animal welfare issues, but if you can't sell the stuff, you need to think seriously about what you're going to do."

The NSW Farmers Association immediately came under heavy fire for its call for an up-front end to mulesing.

Australian Wool Innovation chairman Ian McLachlan said he

could not understand why the NSW Farmers Association had taken such an "extreme view".

"But I do know that doubting and taking a negative view about alternatives now is very destructive," Mr McLachlan said.

Other states' wool grower representatives all rejected an immediate ban and instead called for the whole industry to unite behind the 2010 deadline.

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Top  
of the  
crop

GAETHAN and Nicole Cutri have swept all before them in *The Weekly Times* Farm Business Awards. The Woorinen fruit growers, together with Gaethan's parents, Dom and Connie, were last week crowned Farm Business of the Year. Gaethan was also awarded Young Farmer of the Year.

The award wins vindicated Gaethan's decision to turn his back on a high-profile legal career to head home to the family farm.

Picture: ZOE PHILLIPS  
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