



# Food for thought

Rachel Read finds out exactly why food provenance matters – by learning more from the local food businesses that can help you eat more consciously in the city.



The old saying goes “you are what you eat” – and with increasing numbers of us more concerned about our health and what exactly goes into our meals, the sentiment has never seemed quite so apt. We talk to three independent local businesses to find out exactly why ingredient provenance and food quality matters.

## The butcher: Farmer's Kitchen

Farmer's Kitchen, an online butcher, was started by Katie Campbell and Emma Pike in order to bring fantastic restaurant-quality meat to Hong Kong shoppers – but at affordable prices.

Given that their sole meat supplier is Katie's family farm in New South Wales in Australia, provenance at Farmer's Kitchen is crucial – and since her family has been farming since 1861, these guys really know their stuff! “We know almost everyone involved in the process of making your steak,” Emma explains. “Plus, the whole process is guided by Australia's food safety laws, which are the toughest in the world.”

Katie grew up with access to meat “treated the way that nature intended” – and with a little one on the way, she wanted to provide her children with top-quality, grass-fed meat, too. In contrast to most of the meat sold in supermarkets – which comes from grain-fed animals, which Emma explains is usually treated with chemicals to speed up growth – Farmer's Kitchen “sells the most natural products that we can” without adding any hormones or chemicals; all their meat comes from grass-fed animals that have been naturally raised, which is better for the animal, the consumer and the planet itself. Furthermore, their produce is all sold

chilled, never frozen, ensuring you get the freshest meat possible. Emma believes there is a clear taste difference too, with grass-fed red meat “typically leaner and less fatty with a distinctive full flavour”.

Katie and Emma believe that demand is rising in Hong Kong for healthier food, in particular amongst families like themselves who want to know exactly what goes into their children's diet. “It's only right to be concerned about what we're eating,” Emma states. “It's a process of education and we're happy to be playing a part in it”.

And don't forget about ingredient provenance when you're eating out, either. “If I had to make one recommendation,” advises Emma, “it would be to ask the restaurant you're at what they are serving and where it came from – and make sure that is really what you want to eat.”

Order online at [www.farmerskitchen.com.hk](http://www.farmerskitchen.com.hk)



## The bakers: Niche Food

Started by old school friends Jessica Cheng and Vanessa Cuvelier, Niche Food is an independent bakery where every single item is custom-made to order – meaning you know you're only getting the very freshest sweet treats

around.

Drawing on their Eurasian backgrounds to develop a range of “East meets West” flavours (like their signature pandan and vanilla buttercream cupcake), the pair takes pride in choosing only premium

ingredients for their baked goods, using organic ones wherever possible. “It means we don't make as much money,” explains Jessica, “but we're keen on giving people the best products.”

“We care about what we put into our bodies,” she continues. “With genetically-modified foods and the use of ingredients containing more preservatives, artificial flavourings and other chemicals than ever before on the rise, we wanted to make treats that provide the comfort of knowing that what you're putting into your body is more wholesome and less refined.”

Of course, this means Niche cakes won't last quite as long as the preservative-enhanced treats you might find on the shelves at your supermarket, but the girls believe that the importance of health is catching on here in Hong Kong. They've already noticed an increase in young parents who order from them, eager

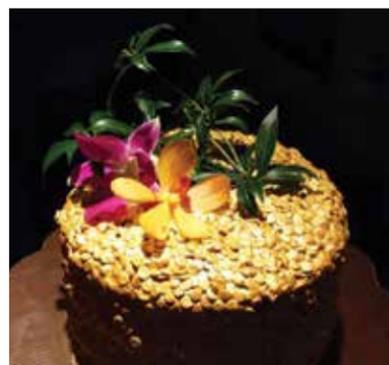


to understand exactly what they're feeding their family.

As an independent business, the girls source all the ingredients themselves, from both specialist baking stores like I Love Cake and Sweet Decorations in Wan Chai, plus organic and health food shops like Just Green or Causeway Bay's Little Giant. Since every item is sourced especially for each order, this means Niche can cater to specific dietary needs and create their cakes in allergen-free environments when necessary; previous requests for vegan, gluten-, dairy-, sugar- and nut-free cakes have all been met with success.

Vanessa has also taken her passion for wholesome eats to start another food business with her sisters, Hapa Food. Underpinned by a similar belief in quality, they specialise in snacks made from raw and whole food ingredients, like "chococups" of almonds, coconut, dark chocolate and raw honey, which offer a healthier alternative to Niche's cupcakes.

So what does soul food mean to Jessica and Vanessa? "Feeding not only your body with wholesome



ingredients, but also your soul with peace of mind." We couldn't have said it better ourselves!

Email [nichefoodhk@gmail.com](mailto:nichefoodhk@gmail.com) to place an order.  
[www.niche-food.com](http://www.niche-food.com)



### The restaurateur: Peggy Chan of Grassroots Pantry

Founded back in 2012 by chef Peggy Chan, vegetarian restaurant Grassroots Pantry is one of the main businesses credited with spearheading a healthier approach to eating in Hong Kong. In fact, it proved so successful that they quickly expanded and have moved to a new space on Hollywood Road this month. It has a catering division and a more casual concept specialising in takeaway meals and cooking classes where you can learn how to whip up delicious veggie feasts at home.

So what inspired Peggy to start Grassroots? "My passion is in promoting food sustainability, the use of local organic ingredients and to lessen our individual carbon footprint through the food choices we make as consumers," Peggy says. "The organic 'green' market five years ago in Hong Kong was not as prominent as it is today," she explains, "I saw there was a market for good clean food to be served at restaurants, and that bringing super-food, plant-based ingredients to the

table in an approachable manner was really lacking in the HK dining industry. Using food as an educational platform to inspire others to eat more consciously made complete sense to me."

Peggy cites factors like "untraceable allergens, mass food-borne outbreaks and the lack of governance in the food industry" as reasons why people are becoming more concerned about what they eat – and believes there is a "genuine market" for more conscious eating in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, she cautions against simply relying on organic certifications; although these make us feel "safer" about purchases, it can often be more worthwhile to look into the origins of the food source and the specific farms or regions your ingredients are grown in – meaning something "naturally grown" but from a better country of origin might taste better than the same ingredient that's "certified organic" from elsewhere. "Quality comes from blood, heart and sweat," she states. "Those who grow and cook food with thought, love and passion ultimately deliver higher quality food."



Accordingly, Grassroots and Prune source as many ingredients as possible from trusted local farms before looking to certified organic farms in China, Thailand or Japan – and other than berries, that's as far afield as their food miles go. Ninety-five per cent of items on their menu are created in-house and from scratch, avoiding the use of processed or pre-made ingredients. Meanwhile, if you plan on cooking at home, Peggy mentions online vegetable suppliers and home delivery services like Homegrown Foods, Eat

Fresh, Green Little Frog and Green Vitamin, who have made it easier for customers to source good quality, fresh ingredients here.

So what does the idea of soul food mean to Peggy? "Food cooked with thought, heart and positive energy – it's not a scientific equation but somehow it always works." Wise words indeed!

Grassroots Pantry, G/F, Shop D, Centrestage, 108 Hollywood Road, Central/Sheung Wan, 2873 3353.  
[www.grassrootspantry.com](http://www.grassrootspantry.com)

