



Tasmania, managing control systems engineering in a manganese processing plant. Establishing a hazelnut farm was still the lynchpin of their strategy for the move. The hunt for a property continued and by now it wasn't just about the hectares. "We wanted to be closer to Launceston for work and schooling too," Carol says.

The discovery of their farm at Glengarry, northern Tasmania, had a certain feeling of fate about it. "There was a bowl of hazelnuts on the table when we walked in. There were hazelnut trees planted around the place already, and on the door to one bedroom was the name Emma," Carol laughs, recalling the memory.

They got to work immediately, moving in February 2010 and planting trees that June. Tamar Valley Hazelnuts was born. "We did the soil prep and got them in straight away," Carol says. "We knew that if we could get them in early, we'd get a crop earlier."

With a lead time of six years in hazelnuts for commercial production, those are the trees that are yielding a crop now. "We're still two years away from being self-sufficient," Carol adds.

The ultimate aim is for both she and Nathan to work on-farm, with the business supporting the family. "We did the sums to figure out how many trees we'd need for that to happen, and it was five thousand. That should produce about sixty tonnes a year, and even at international prices, that's enough to live on."

By now Emma had been joined by brother Simon. Not

content with establishing a new farm and juggling a young family at the same time, Carol joined the committee of Hazelnut Growers Australia, running the newsletter and organising a national conference in Tasmania. The plan for their own farm developed too.

With only one other hazelnut farm in Tasmania big enough to have processing equipment, Carol and Nathan opted to purchase the equipment to wash, dry and shell nuts for their own business and other growers.

Even a farm with just one hundred trees, Carol says, is faced with the challenge of processing a tonne of nuts each year.

"Up to that quantity you can handle it locally with friends and family," Carol says. "Beyond that, it becomes a lot for people to manage with no equipment."

Demand for hazelnuts in shell is minimal, she says. Bakers and chocolatiers want them shelled and the major manufacturers have their own orchards and processing plants.

Things went up yet another notch when Carol won the Rural Women's Award in Tasmania in 2015.

"It gave me a little nudge to stop waiting around for other people to do the things you see need to be done in your region, and just do them myself," Carol says.

Looking to increase her own knowledge of the industry worldwide and Australia's place in it, and transition her own farm from orchard to processor, Carol used the \$10,000 bursary to travel with Nathan to Oregon, the north American heartland of hazelnut growing.

The scale of the industry worldwide was self-evident. "America only has five processors and thirty thousand tonnes of nuts going through every year," Carol says.

One cooperative with its own processing facilities numbered 650 growers. Many nut farms were owned by families but there the similarities with Australia ended. "We have to really be clever at how we farm, because our soils are old and run down," Carol says. "In Oregon, they had soils so deep they just put the tree in the ground and it grew. That kind of soil is magnificent, you could grow anything there."

Carol believes the award gave her the confidence to play most of a role in her region's development, which she does in her signature quiet and understated way.

While she has stepped down from the Hazelnut Growers Association, Nathan remains treasurer. When the first ever 'tri-nut' conference of Australia's chestnut, walnut and hazelnut associations takes place in the West Tamar later this year, Tamar Valley Hazelnuts is one of the farms they will tour.

Carol, meanwhile, was elected to the West Tamar Council in 2011 and now chairs a new Farm Gate Festival, in which West Tamar farms will open to the public one weekend each year, attracting visitors from across Tasmania and ultimately the mainland too.

Carol believes the experience as the Rural Women's Award is a catalyst to encourage women such as herself to back such initiatives – and themselves.

"You're prompted to think about not just your own industry but the whole of agriculture and the bigger picture, and what your region actually needs," Carol says.

There's no resting on their laurels in their own business, either. Carol is kept busy growing connections in the wholesale market. A collaboration with Strait Brands has resulted in a hazelnut gin, smooth and warm, brewed locally and leveraging the Tamar Valley grown branding.

More delicious hazelnut products are in the pipeline through a partnership with a chef and former delicatessen owner who is combining hazelnuts and honey to accompany cheese. It's a far cry from the desks of Canberra and a career in academic research. Some of her achievements over the past years have surprised nobody more than herself.

"I guess because we'd only been in the farming business and lived here for six years, I didn't feel we were serious farmers yet," Carol reflects. "Much of this is about acknowledging that I am a farmer, and that I am going to set up and do things for my farming community. I've given myself permission to do that."

The Tri-nut conference is on from 2nd-4th September at the Aspect Tamar Valley Resort.

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an unexpected career

Carol Bracken never expected to be an ambassador for the hazelnut industry with a farm in her home state of Tasmania. After studying biochemistry at university, she was intent upon a career in research. "That was before I found out how long a PhD could take," Carol laughs. ment upon a career in research.

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Newly graduated from university in Canberra and newly married, she and husband Nathan were a long way away from being joint farm owners.

Nathan too was finding his own planned career wasn't quite what he had anticipated. With a degree in IT software engineering completed through the Australian Defence Force Academy, he was training to be an air force pilot. "But he realised that being a pilot was just like driving a very fast bus," Carol says. "You had to stick to the route."

With career directions re-assessed, the two settled into desk jobs in Canberra, Nathan as a software engineer and Carol learning project management and running million dollar projects in telecommunications.

"We were quite content with our jobs there," Carol says. "But then we decided to start a family and work got to that point where you've been there for seven years and everything started repeating itself."

Spending all their leave making the arduous two-flight trip home to Tasmania, the couple decided to try Melbourne for a while, to be closer to home. They found the noise, traffic and people oppressive. After their first child Emma was born, Carol found she couldn't bear the thought of her growing up and going to school on the train. "Where's picking blackberries on the weekend?" she asked.

And that's when hazelnuts first appeared on the horizon.

Nathan's family had been generational dairy farmers in northern Tasmania, and Carol's parents had a hobby farm in the same area.

"I knew about growing things and I loved fruit trees, and we knew farming was something that Tasmania did well," Carol explains.

Visiting for Christmas in 2009, they met the French family, who at that time owned Tasmania's longest established hazelnut farm, Hazelbrae. "They had really researched the industry and they introduced us to the peak body, the Hazelnut Growers of Australia," Carol recalls.

The couple went to the association's conference in Victoria and made more contacts. With plans for their own hazelnut farm firming up, Carol approached the matter of moving with the thoroughness of a project manager. "We did our business plan to see if the financials stacked up, and then we started looking for properties."

As luck would have it, Tasmania's water supply companies were amalgamating and the administration was being streamlined. Carol won the role of Project Manager implementing the changes. "It was a really crazy time," she says. "I don't know how I did it; Emma wasn't even sleeping and I was pregnant with Simon."

They struck it lucky when Nathan also found work in

