

The Australian lavender farm expanding to meet Chinese demand

By

Sandra Fulloon, Sarah Dowling
SBS

China remains Australia's top export market, with 40 per cent of all exported goods and services heading to the mainland. And there's a rising demand for Australian grown lavender. A family farm in South Australia is expanding to meet this lucrative market.



Lavender farmers Allan and Rhona Parker-Benton are expanding their business.

Beyond Adelaide's rolling hills south-east of the city, a boutique lavender farm is in full bloom. Husband and wife team Rhona and Allan Parker-Benton are walking the purple-headed rows, clipping sprays of scented flower stems.

Brayfield Park is their family business. They currently farm one planted hectare, but are expanding the business to meet rising offshore demand for Australian-grown lavender, as part of China's burgeoning \$40 billion cosmetics industry.

"Lavender is so popular in China right now that fast-food outlets even sell lavender ice cream," Mrs Parker-Benton explained.

The oil extracted from *Lavender Angustifolia* is highly sought-after worldwide for its skin healing and therapeutic qualities.

The couple is planting-out a new 40 hectare property in the Murraylands this year, and it includes Murray River frontage.

"The soil, water and climate is ideal for growing productive lander on a commercial scale," Mrs Parker-Benton explained.

The site will be developed with a processing plant and an eco-tourism facility on the riverfront.

It's a huge investment for the business, and potentially risky.

"Conservatively we'll probably start at a million dollar investment, but going forward it'd probably end up more over two million dollars," Mrs Parker-Benton explained.

"It's still the biggest risk we've ever taken. But it's going to pay off and we're quite confident of that now we're coming out the other end."



Brayfield Park as a shopfront at Hahndorf, in the Adelaide Hills.

They recently negotiated a long lease for the new riverfront property, where they aim to plant 130 thousand lavender plants within the first two or three years.

The expansion of Brayfield Park and its lavender products is also expected to drive more tourism to the region.

Lavender farms in South Australia and Tasmania are hot ticket destinations for Chinese tourists, with thousands flocking to the lavender fields each year.

"[The Murraylands site] has magnificent views over the river Murray. It's got everything we need from both a tourism perspective and a plant perspective," Mrs Parker-Benton explained.

"It's not just a shop. We are planning a culinary experience and a behind-the-scenes tour into our cosmetic area featuring lavender skincare and beauty products".

South Australia's Tourism Commission said last year's record seven-point-two billion visitor boost to the state's economy included significant growth in regional tourism.



South Australia has ideal conditions for growing lavender.

Brayfield Park already has a shop in Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills and recently expanded its product range to cosmetics, containing natural lavender ingredients.

“Obviously we’re a lavender farm, that’s our focus and lavender is the hero of our products. And now for the Chinese and the Asian market, we’ve incorporated [lavender] into a skincare range”.

“In late 2019 we received approval to export four key products to China, the hydrating mist, the massage oil, the hand lotion and the relaxation roll-on”, Mrs Parker-Benton said.

Brayfield Park farm hopes eventually to supply up to 100,000 bottles to China a month, at a value of about \$20 million in the Chinese market.

The couple has overcome many challenges to enter China's highly regulated industry.

“If somebody told me that it would take two years to go through the journey of producing a new product, working through new branding, logos, packaging and then getting it into China for approval I probably would have backed off at that point,” Mrs Parker-Benton explained.

“But now we’ve done it once, we’re confident in going through the process again. But it has been challenging and it’s been a bit of a journey”.