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City Life Magazine – January editorial – tropical cuisine

Over the last 3 years Red Ochre Grills Owner Chef Craig Squire has been keenly involved with the use and promotion of local foods. It all began with a meeting organized by the then Far North Queensland Promotion Bureau to facilitate interest in Tasting Australia, an event held biannually in Adelaide. With little corporate or government support a team of chefs was created from winners at the local salon culinaire, they devised a unique tropical menu for entry in the Australian regional culinary competition. Where they gained 8th place out of 26 entries. Craig along with assistance from the newly formed Cairns Regional Economic Development Corporation and Eco-Fish organized a stall displaying regional produce and with the hard working chefs help ship, prepare, cook and serve 4000 serves of Tropical Cuisine to the gourmands of Adelaide. The now infamous Sugarcane Prawn sticks and Smoked barramundi with green papaya salad served in a half coconut. Thus began Australian Tropical Foods an industry cluster group and Craig's role as Chairman under the umbrella of CREDC.

Australian Tropical Foods has a diverse membership base from small producers to large 5 star hotels, it over the last few years has assisted these members and the regions food industry in creating a hub for food journalism, with TV chefs like Neil Perry, Aristos and Maeve O'mara using this area recently, and ? from my Restaurant Rules coming the north queensland soon. Also assisting in networking suppliers and users, a conduit for information and promotion. The biggest achievement so far is the creation of the Tropical Food Trail which includes the Mountain Tablelands, Northern Tablelands, Great Green Way, Tropic Coast and Rainforest, this trail is printed in a brochure available at most information centers, hire car companies and all participants or on the fantastic web site created by justpurple www.australian-tropical-foods.com . Day-trippers can self drive or take a new tour to experience some fantastic farms, gourmet produce and restaurants in the tropical north. . It is amazing the range of product that is unknown to most; Red Claw, Mango Wine, Sim's Asian Foods, Pasta, Cashews, farmed barramundi, herbs, tea, coffee, cheeses amongst many others. Red Ochre's chefs are looking forward to tasting local Olive Oil from Herbeton.

Red Ochre has continued to showcase some of the best examples of regional produce developing a true tropical Australian cuisine along the way, dishes like Tempura gulf bugs skewered on lemongrass with green papaya salad - sweet chilli lemon myrtle dipping sauce and Twice cooked Mareeba Pork with Master stock glaze, rice cake and pineapple chilli Jam, These dishes were successful in this years Regional Feast of Senses Menu competition judged by Peter Howard. In conjunction with the restaurant renovations Red Ochre has developed a range of retail gourmet products. Available in 45gm, 110 gm and 190 gm jars. These are all made in the restaurant kitchens and are tried and tested recipes that have become menu staples over many years. Including Lemon Aspen Chilli Sambal, Rocket and Macadamia Pesto, Dukka, Mango Chutney, and "Secret Spice" a special spice blend that many will recognize from the Calamari Skewers so popular at cocktail Parties. All products are made fresh without additives and are available from the restaurant and selected retail outlets.