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Forum Forges New Food Region

This week's historic Granite Belt Food Forum heralded the beginning of a transformation for the Queensland wine capital into Australia's newest food and wine region.

The Forum was an initiative of Granite Belt Wine & Tourism (GBWT). It was held at QCWT¹ on Wednesday 4 June 2008 and attracted more than 80 delegates throughout the food chain plus tourism and government stakeholders.

Leading the forum was Mr Peter Howard, Australia's leading wine and food commentator and consultant. Guest speaker Ms Kim Currie travelled from Orange in NSW to share their experiences in developing *Taste of Orange*, a highly successful and nationally acclaimed project.

Ms Currie commented that success in building a regional food brand required product, place and people. She said that the Granite Belt had all those ingredients, as well as the benefit of a strong, established organisation like the GBWT.

The forum created an opportunity for cross fertilisation of local representatives from paddock to pantry to plate. Mr Howard said he was delighted to work on this exciting project in its embryonic stage to develop a plan for Granite Belt food, both as a brand and as a visitor experience.

In drawing together conclusions from the presentations and a series of group brainstorming sessions, Mr Howard called on delegates for consensus on the way forward. Of the many ideas tabled, the group prioritised the first two key recommendations from the forum:

1. To establish a Granite Belt Food Group to fall within the GBWT. In broad terms this would adopt the same successful model as the organisation's existing wine sub-committee, which has its own industry strategy, chair and committee.
2. To promote Granite Belt food, the group agreed to adopt and adapt the existing Granite Belt Wine Country brand, again using the same model developed for Granite Belt Wines.

Mr Howard confirmed that the recommendations will be tabled at the GBWT's next board meeting on June 12th. A further sign of the depth of interest in the initiative, more than a dozen delegates also nominated to participate in the food group which will develop protocols for a range of food related initiatives. These would cover technical and quality issues as well as consumer related activities.

Delegates at the forum were also the first to learn of a number of recent developments. These included:

- Confirmation that GBWT has negotiated quarterly "regional/seasonal" growers markets at South Bank – dates for which will be announced shortly.
- The unveiling of a generic "Granite Belt Wines" poster – the first application for regional branding of wines from the Queensland wine capital.
- A promotion which will see Granite Belt food and wines being featured each day at the Ekka on the Taste of Queensland Show stage.

The first three action items identified for the new food group are: how to progress the development of an on-line register of produce/producers; the establishment of a farmers market

¹ Queensland College of Wine Tourism

on the Granite Belt, most likely in association with the well-established Market in the Mountains; and the commercial opportunity for a food providore to provide the essential link between grower and the food service industry.

In closing the forum, Peter Howard paid tribute to the GBWT for its vision in hosting the forum and for investing in this type of product development.

GBWT President Mrs Bobbi Cragg recognised the support received from the Department of Tourism, Regional Development & Industry as well as the Southern Down & Granite Belt Regional Tourism.

To learn more about Queensland's premier wine region visit www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au or phone 1800 SO COOL and expect to be surprised!

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1. **Wine** The history of the Queensland wine industry dates back to the 1860s - and like all good wines it has developed with age. Of Queensland's current 1100 hectares planted to wine grapes, approximately half of these are on the Granite Belt. It is also the largest of the ten wine regions in the state and one of only two with official GI status. The Granite Belt is home to approximately 50 wine cellar doors, the state's most awarded winemakers, plus the Queensland College of Wine Tourism – the first of its type in the world.
2. **Food** The Granite Belt is the only area in Queensland to produce apples: creating a gross value of approximately \$35m per annum (DPI&F 2006). Agriculture is the largest employer in the area, which boasts a vibrant and diverse horticultural sector.
3. **Forecasts Food production figures** – source Darling Downs & South West Queensland Centre of Enterprise and AEC Group 2007.

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