



Fruitful venture: Mary Biggs has turned Featherston's lemons into a viable business and is now eyeing the Melbourne marketplace. Photo: ROBERT KITCHIN

Lavender dream turned out a lemon

CLAIRE McENTEE

WHEN life gives you lemons you're supposed to make lemonade – or so the saying goes – and that's exactly what Lavender's Green founder Mary Biggs did.

A move to a homestead on 7.3 hectares (18 acres) in Featherston in 1997 had Ms Biggs originally eyeing up a future in organic lavender farming.

"It just seemed like a gorgeous thing to do. I saw myself speaking French and living in Provence. It didn't work out like that, of course."

Lavender farming coupled with raising children soon proved to be

"really hard work", and it wasn't long before she stumbled upon another venture. "I noticed there were all these amazing lemon trees in Featherston but the lemons were just falling on the ground and going to waste. "I still wanted to make an income and work from home. So I had the idea of making lemon cordial which my friends and I had always made for school fairs."

Ms Biggs took one of her first batches to Wellington department store Kirkcaldie & Stains and



KEEPING COMPANY

Know a great company?

E-mail:
businessday@dompost.co.nz

ent lemon products."

Today Lavender's Green products – including lemon curd and roast lemon chutney – are sold in more than 100 outlets around New Zealand. The business' products

netted an order for 500 bottles.

After a spell hiring out the kitchen at the local RSA, she decided to get serious and install a commercial kitchen in the family home.

"Once I had a kitchen I had to keep it busy so I came up with a whole range of differ-

are competitively priced, and its "flagship" lemon and lime cordials sell for between \$12 and \$18, depending on the outlet.

Lavender's Green has grown steadily each year and now turns over about \$250,000 a year, she says

Ms Biggs plans to begin selling the products in Melbourne, where she lives with her husband advertising guru Peter Biggs – who heads Clemenger BBDO there – and is relishing the challenge that the new market brings.

"It's been so easy to do business in New Zealand. In Australia the competition is greater and the scale is so much greater, too."

The company's products have

potential as ingredients in other foods, and its lemon curd is already used by an icecream manufacturer, she says.

Ms Biggs returns to New Zealand every six weeks or so to hold tastings, meet distributors and check in with her five staff.

Lavender's Green is a true Featherston product, she says.

The company sources some lemons from people's backyards in exchange for its products, and the Featherston Mobil petrol station is one of its longest-serving and proudest stockists. "There's a real sense that we've got Featherston behind us. They own the brand as much as we do."