

## Minutes with JEANNE

- 1** Inspired by her love for the sea, her favourite holiday destination is Greece.
- 2** What she loves most about Cape Town is that there is so much to do in a 200km radius, from Tankwa Karo to the Winelands and the coast.
- 3** Her favourite homemade meal is stuffed chicken with pesto and feta, rolled up in bacon.
- 4** To unwind, she spends time with family and friends, particularly enjoying a Friday night braai on the stoep.
- 5** Jeanne is an adrenaline junkie and rides her mountain bike as often as possible.



# Jeanne's NO CHICKEN

Meet the woman behind Elgin Free Range Chickes, the largest independent free-range chicken company in South Africa. From producing 100 chickens every eight weeks to 100 000 every week, Elgin has gone from strength to strength in the hands of founder Jeanne Groenewald.

WORDS: MANDISA NDULI

**B**orn and raised on a farm in Wellington, farming is without a doubt in Jeanne's blood. "I loved being out on the farm and helping my dad. It definitely stood me in good stead for starting my own free range chickens," she says.

Inspired by her fathers duck business, where she spent some time working, she began farming chickens for personal consumption. "When I left the duck business I moved to the Overberg and started farming with 100 chickens in my backyard for own consumption. Friends and family tasted my free range, drug-free birds and ordered from me for the next time I did a batch," she explains. That was 20 years ago, and the business has grown at an impressive pace ever since.

Today, Elgin employs over 600 people and supplies free-range chickens to food retailer Woolworths. "I had grown my business for one of the other major retailers in South Africa who ended up letting me down with the volume uptake they had committed to. I made a call to Woolworths and asked if they were

looking for free range chickens. We were packing for them within three weeks."

With a constant need to grow and improve, the future of Elgin is a promising one, and the company is determined to expand into the global market. "We've sent a shipment to Doha, but due to the current avian influenza status in our country, another shipment isn't possible. We will, however, keep our export licence up to date and will revisit once we have the ban on exports lifted," she says.

Although she has not applied much of her BSc agriculture in animal psychology and genetics to her farming, it has helped her understand business operations better. "Farming is a science and having a BSc definitely assists in understanding a lot of the science behind it, understanding the diseases that are potentially threatening and the treatments thereof."

Jeanne says one of the contributing factors to her company's success is delegation. "Once I mastered the art of delegation, my business really started to grow as I had more time to spend on strategising. The other lesson I've learnt

is that you need to lead from behind. Empower the people you put in positions and guide them from behind, don't lead from the front," she explains.

When asked about her favourite childhood memory, Jeanne says it was definitely the freedom she and her siblings had growing up on a farm. "We had horses and used to ride to neighbours for the afternoon and then ride back. We would spend weekends sleeping in the stables with horses, it was safe and innocent fun. No cellphones, TV or internet."

The mother of two says it's difficult to achieve a work and homelife balance for entrepreneurs. "I spent many hours working in the middle of the night to be able to take quality time out during the day while the kids were awake. This becomes unsustainable and you do reach burnout. I think every working mom lives with a huge feeling of guilt when it comes to time with her children," she adds.

With a product that has become synonymous with quality and great service, it's safe to say that Elgin is destined for success in Jeanne's hands.

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