The Hilltops region is located in the Tablelands of New South Wales. The area is just over an hour north of Canberra and features the thriving towns of Young, Harden and Boorowa, along with a wide range of villages that are bursting with a rich history. The region is renowned for agriculture, including sheep grazing, cropping, viticulture, stone fruits and horticulture. The area is located along a strategic transport corridor, including the Hume Highway, which is the busiest interstate road freight corridor in Australia, and is closely connected to major markets, including Sydney and Canberra. In fact, 60% of Australia’s population can be reached from Young within 10 hours driving time.

**DRIVING TIMES FROM YOUNG**
- Cowra 55 minutes
- Wagga Wagga 1 hour, 50 minutes
- Canberra airport 2 hours
- Canberra CBD 1 hour, 55 minutes
- Bathurst and Orange 2 hours, 10 minutes
- Sydney airport 3 hours, 45 minutes
- Sydney CBD 4 hours, 5 minutes
- Melbourne 6 hours, 10 minutes
Economic Snapshot

**People**
- Population: 18,993
- Population growth since 2011: 1%
- Projected growth to 2036: 5.5%
- Average income: $576 pw
- Unemployment rate: 6.9% (Sept 2017)
- 6,428 local jobs
- 98% of the jobs in Hilltops are done by people who live in the LGA
- 29 GPs per 10,000 people

**Places**
- Young
  - Median house price: $274K
  - Median rent per week: $265
  - Median unit prices: $190K
- Exports 2016: $714.3M
- 2,270 businesses
- 16 primary schools
- 4 high schools
- $22M (2016-2017) value of building approvals

**Products**
- Exports 2016: $714.3M
- Gross value added 2016 (CVA): $747M
- Agriculture: 23.6%
- Manufacturing: 7.2%
- Tourism & hospitality: 6.5%
- Everything else: 62.7%
- Economic growth: 1.5%
- Top 3 industries by employment:
  - Agriculture, forestry, fishing
  - Retail trade
  - Healthcare and social assistance
- Headline Gross Regional Product June 2015-2016
- Total tourism and hospitality sales in 2016: $86.4M
The Hilltops region is building on its traditional agricultural strengths, as well as on the area’s cultural history to diversify agriculture and encourage tourism. The region’s strategic assets also come from the natural environment, the strategic location of the region along transport hubs and great infrastructure and services.

**READY FOR BUSINESS**

Hilltops is steadily becoming the headquarters for businesses that have expanded into neighboring towns and centres, while others have forged expertise that brings clients to the region from a wide radius.

Hilltops is home to innovative businesses in the field of research, technology, milling, genetics, accounting, telecommunications, construction, sustainability, concreting, mining and biogas. Established sectors of the economy other than agriculture include retail, law, finance, allied health and retirement and aged care.

In comparison to other areas, Hilltops offers low business overheads for set-up and reliable support from good utilities and services such as power, water, natural gas and high speed internet. This means that you can base yourself in the area for an idyllic lifestyle, connect and conduct business anywhere across the globe.

The fact that all the major banks maintain a presence in the area is also a strong indicator of the level of business activity and confidence.

**TOURISM**

The Hilltops region is renowned for its beautiful natural landscape, fresh produce, wine and an intriguing pioneering history, including links to international markets, such as China, that date back to the gold rush in the 1800s. With China’s increasing interest in NSW as a tourism destination in particular, there is an opportunity to grow international and national visitor numbers.

There’s always plenty for people to do and see and the Hilltops area hosts a number of festivals and events over the year including the National Cherry Festival, the Harden Kite Festival, Boorowa’s Irish Wool Festival and the Lambing Flat Chinese Festival in Young.

**LIFESTYLE**

According to a recent Council survey, the relaxed country lifestyle, peace and quiet and the wide open spaces are the things that people most love about living in the region. Importantly, community is also high on the list.

There is certainly evidence of this with there being plenty of services and cultural and community facilities, such as sporting grounds, golf courses, gardens and parks and more than 60 local clubs and recreational groups.

Another major advantage of living in the Hilltops area is affordability of housing with low house prices and rent. There are also plenty of options to choose from at both the bottom and top end of the housing market.

For families with children, there are a lot of choices in educational facilities including 16 primary and four high schools. There are also seven childcare centres in the area. There are many options for school leavers as well, including the Young TAFE, a regional music school, a campus of the Australian National University and of the Australian Catholic University. A Country Universities Centre (CUC) is also proposed with some CUC courses already delivered locally. The CUC is a facility that provides campus like facilities to regional students.

**HEALTHCARE**

The Hilltops area is serviced by three hospitals, one located in each of the major centres of Boorowa, Harden and Young. There are a number of GP practices and the region also boasts a range of allied health services including Podiatry, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Physiotherapy, Optometry, Audiology, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Diversional Therapy, Pulmonary Rehabilitation, Diabetes Education and Chiropractic. The Young Health Service incorporating Young District Hospital, Mercy Care Centre and Young Community Health Service offer a total of 50 beds covering modern acute care, sub-acute care, palliative care, surgical, emergency, paediatric and maternity service, a high dependency unit, a Renal Department and a separate Oncology Unit. The Boorowa MultiPurpose Service (MPS) is an 18 bed facility and the Murrumburrah-Harden Health Service is a 33 bed facility with both services offering acute care and residential aged care along with a 24 hour emergency department. Senior residents of the community are exceptionally well catered for with a range of aged care facilities in the region including Mount St. Joseph’s Nursing Home, Southern Cross Aged Care, Burrowa House and St Lawrence Residential Aged Care.
The Hilltops region’s most significant economic contributor is the agricultural sector, which has obvious and strong connections to the other major industries of manufacturing, tourism, health care, social assistance and retail trade.

**RELIABLE AND DIVERSE AGRICULTURE**

Strong agriculture, combined with location close to markets, makes for great business opportunities. The reliability and diversity of agriculture in the region due to positive climate and soil quality enables the Hilltops region to be one of the safest agricultural production regions in Australia. Climate change and food security are increasingly important issues both nationally and internationally. The relatively high presence of agricultural producers, along with associated food product manufacturing, means that the region is well positioned to capture some of the expected growth in demand for agricultural and higher value food products. In addition to viticulture and stone fruits, the region is known for broadacre crops, livestock and organic, free range meat production such as pork, beef, lamb, duck and chicken. All are vital ingredients for ‘Paddock to Plate’ value adding and cottage industries. Residents and locals alike are spoilt for choice in locally made jams, chutneys, pies and condiments – whilst flour milled in Young can be found in local pantries as well as national supermarkets.

**VITICULTURE**

Hilltops is rapidly emerging as one of the most exciting viticultural regions in Australia. The high altitude, coupled with the dry summer and autumn, provides excellent ripening conditions. This and the rich red soils enable the production of wines with great intensity of flavour and finesse. The region currently has 13 wine producers and five cellar doors.

**STONE FRUITS**

The Hilltops climate also provides excellent ripening conditions for stone fruit. Cherries are a local hero along with other stone fruit including, plums, peaches, nectarines, apricots, figs and other niche fruit. Some Hilltops region orchards and berry farms offer the opportunity to “pick your own”. The main picking season in Young usually starts in late October and continues through until January.
Darren Garnon started the business in Queanbeyan in 1997. In 2007, the business outgrew the Queanbeyan site and Darren began looking for land at locations not too far from Queanbeyan. LubeAlloy are the only oil manufacturers in Australia currently located outside of a metropolitan area. The move to Harden was prompted by the need for more space to expand operations. In Harden, Darren was able to purchase the space he needed at a very reasonable price.

Darren sees being located in Harden as an advantage. The company is close to many of its agricultural customers and has developed a range of specific lubricants for agri-businesses.

Harden works well logistically, being near the Hume Highway and between Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

The company employs 3 full-time staff and 4 part-time staff in Harden and another 5 full-time staff work from the Queanbeyan office.

The company is constantly innovating and is looking at opportunities to expand that arise from their rural location. For example, Darren is currently working with local agricultural businesses to develop a product which uses biomass from agricultural by-products.

LubeAlloy operates out of Harden and has a head office in Queanbeyan. The company manufactures specialised high performance lubricants, oils and greases specifically formulated and engineered to handle the toughest Australian industrial and commercial applications and conditions.
Case Studies

**APOLLO FABRICATION** is a family owned and operated business renowned for its accuracy and efficiency in the manufacture and installation of structural and architectural steelwork. Apollo Fabrication has a workforce of 25 highly qualified production staff, in addition to 3 apprentice tradespeople, office and management personnel. Apollo has completed a diverse range of projects for clients across Australia.

Apollo Fabrication was established in Young in 2003. Initially manufacturing steel skip bins for waste collection, the business quickly expanded into the fabrication and installation of structural steel for the building construction industry. Apollo enjoys a reputation for producing accurately fabricated members which are necessary for the efficient on-site installation of steelwork.

In 2010, the business expanded by purchasing a property which incorporates large workshops equipped with gantry cranes with up to 10 tonnes lifting capacity. Additional buildings house spray painting and abrasive blasting equipment and well appointed office buildings, combine to provide a facility which enables Apollo to accommodate tight production schedules, and also provide for further future development. Because of the availability and affordability of space in Young, Apollo now has the capacity to process in excess of 200 tonnes of steelwork monthly.

Distance from the city is no problem for Apollo. To ensure on time delivery, Apollo operate their own crane equipped heavy transport. This gives Apollo the ability to control delivery times to suit customers across Australia without being dependent on other transport organisations.

**PEPE’S DUCKS** has grown from a tiny duck farm in Quakers Hill, NSW, to one of the industry leaders in duck production across Australia and New Zealand. In fact, the company now operates Australia’s largest duck farm in Harden.

The company was founded by Pepe Bonaccardo in 1976, from his small backyard in NSW; where Pepe bred and raised his first ever duck. John Houston, General Manager at Pepe’s says, “I’ve seen the business grow immensely - when I started (in 1997) we were producing about 28,000 ducks a week, now we’re producing 80,000. That in itself is a great achievement. The demand for duck continues to increase, so the industry and the company have a huge future as we see duck migrate into many restaurants and family homes”.

As a result of this growth, in 2014, the Sydney based company began to look for an expansion site to relocate their farm outside the Sydney basin. John says that Pepe’s wanted to move outside the Sydney area to a site that wouldn’t be turned into suburbs. The company looked North, South and West before finally buying their current site in Harden. Since purchasing the site, John says they have built 20 out of the 27 barns that will eventually be housed on the site.

Apart from the additional space, another advantage of locating the farm in Harden is that the climate is well suited for intensive duck farming. The farm is also close to the raw materials they need to feed the ducks. Pepe’s uses a food pellet made from locally grown wheat that is processed in the Southern Highlands before returning to Harden. Being so close to transport corridors makes this process possible. John says that, “the Harden Community and Council couldn’t have been more supportive and in return Pepe’s Ducks supports numerous local community groups and sporting clubs”. John says Pepe’s currently employs 12 staff from the local area and that number will go to 15 once the barns are completed.
Case Study

KC NATURAL is a beef company founded by Sam Burton Taylor. From a lucrative finance career to a butcher shop in a country town, Sam Burton Taylor’s journey to selling beef and lamb to China and the Middle East has been an interesting one.

Buying a butcher shop in his hometown of Boorowa and then doing his apprenticeship was certainly a big change from Mr Burton Taylor’s former career in Sydney. But it was part of a plan for Sam and his wife Nikki to return to living in the country. Despite his grandfather having been a butcher in Sydney’s Northern Beaches many years ago, this was not a factor in Mr Burton Taylor’s motivation.

“I bought a small butcher shop in Boorowa because I wanted to work with meat. I learnt my trade for four years, learnt the retail side of things on the job and did some online sales into Sydney and Canberra. The long term aim was always to get into export,” he said.

“I had a really good team at the butcher shop and the guys taught me a lot about how to cut meat. I also had some great TAFE teachers.”

“Yeah, I probably did it all a bit arse about,” he said of the way he got into meat.

“But it was a very valuable learning experience for what I am doing now.” He has since sold the butcher shop and, now from a small office across the road above the town’s newsagency, he runs his export business.

Joining him at a desk nearby is employee Yichi Zheng who hails from Shanghai but completed his final years of school in Sydney and then graduated from Sydney University with an agricultural economics degree. Mr Zheng laughs about how his choice of study was very different to his compatriots who tended towards finance and accounting disciplines. “Everyone has to eat food. That is probably the main reason why I wanted to study agriculture,” Mr Zheng said. Now dividing his time between Boorowa and Sydney, his lifestyle is very different to what he imagined when he first moved to Australia from one of the world’s most populous cities. He says “getting involved in the rural culture” has been made easier by the Burton Taylor family who have included him in life outside the business. "Once you get used to it you start to enjoy it because the people are very welcoming."

The business looks at consistency of supply and convincing potential Chinese customers of the merits of Australian grass-fed beef and lamb, compared with livestock fed overseas on grain. Part of this includes Mr Burton Taylor linking up with farmers who over the years have bought cattle from the family’s Kenny Creek Angus stud. "This gives them [the customers] a choice as to how their cattle are marketed,” he said. Knowing where the meat comes from is a selling point in dealing with what Mr Zheng describes as the "unique mindset" of the Chinese, which until now has seen them buying purely on price. “It is about finding customers in China who can help tell our story: talk about the farm and where the livestock are from, so it has more of a focus on the cattle,” Mr Burton Taylor said.

The target customers are predominantly supermarkets catering to the higher end of the market. To convince them, Mr Zheng said nothing works better than getting them to taste the meat. “Often when Chinese come to the farm the best way is to get them to try the beef. Every time they taste the meat they say that actually it is better than what they thought.”

The small office overlooking Boorowa’s main street is certainly different to the hustle and bustle of Shanghai and the very competitive environment of Sydney’s finance sector. However it is the right setting for a foray into attracting Chinese and Middle Eastern palates to Australian grass-fed beef and lamb.
NOTES

FAST FACTS, REGIONAL SUMMARY AND ECONOMIC SNAPSHOTS

Current population. These estimates for Local Government Areas (LGAs) are prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to correct for the Census under count and are updated annually. These are the closest to official estimates of resident population and are often used by State Government in allocating per capita funding to LGAs.


Projected population growth to 2036. Estimates are to 2036 and are prepared by ID and available under the Joint Organisation of Councils subscription.

Median house & unit price. This data comes from local real estate agents and is based on property sales over the previous 12 months (January 2017-January 2018).

Other data in the Economic Snapshots the Joint Organisation of Councils subscriptions to ID profiles or directly from 2016 census data.

PHOTO CREDITS

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REFERENCES


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