



Michael Harden and Necia Wilden

The inside stories
from the restaurant
world.

Hey big spender

Is the Rudd Government finally starting to join the dots on the importance of the food and wine industry to our

country's future? In between grazing on salt-cod akra with beetroot mayonnaise, oysters with dill jelly and risotto of white asparagus and jamon at a lunch event recently at the one-hat Montalto restaurant in Red Hill, Federal Minister for Tourism Martin Ferguson told the 100-strong crowd of local producers and restaurateurs that the importance of food and wine tourism had been undersold by previous governments. "The food and wine section . . . is exceptionally important in terms of attracting high-yield tourists to Australia from overseas." In other words, we want people who spend, not scrimp. Good to see we might be finally catching up with New Zealand, which latched on to the lure of the affluent overseas food and wine lover years ago. Ferguson was launching the membership program of the new website visitvineyards.com, a sophisticated information resource on Australian food and wine regions to which his department has granted \$75,000 through the Regional Tourism program. Visit Vineyards CEO Robyn Lewis said the membership program seeks to help people "uncover the colour, flavour and secrets of their chosen region". An annual fee of \$49 entitles you to a raft of privileges and special experiences at a host of wineries, restaurants and other tourism businesses. For details, go to visitvineyards.com