

The logo is a red circle containing the text 'buy from the bush' in white. 'buy' is in a lowercase serif font, 'from the' is in a smaller lowercase sans-serif font, and 'bush' is in a larger lowercase serif font. A small white floral icon is positioned to the right of 'buy'.

buy
from the
bush

**Buy From The Bush: Harnessing the
power of digital tools to create lasting
change in rural Australia.**

Impact Report

FEBRUARY 2022

Buy From The Bush was born of drought, but it's impact has reached far beyond short term crisis-relief. Our campaign has sparked tangible and sustained change in rural Australia.



Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
At a glance	6
SECTION 1	
Buy From The Bush fosters the growth of female-led business which diversifies regional economies	7
Case study: Peggy & Twig	9
Case study: Emmanate Creative	10
SECTION 2	
Digitally-enabled small businesses can crisis-proof rural communities	11
Case study: Perenniale Plants	13
Case study: Singing Magpie Produce	14
SECTION 3	
Buy From The Bush is broadening people's perception of rural Australia beyond the farm gate	5
Case study: PHYLLi Designs	18



Foreword



Buy From The Bush (BFTB) was born of drought, but its impact has reached far beyond short term crisis-relief.

What started as a social media campaign has sparked tangible and sustained change for small businesses and communities across rural Australia. In the two years since its inception, BFTB has morphed into a successful purpose-driven business with more than 550,000 followers across Facebook and Instagram. It has generated more than \$9M in revenue for rural small businesses.

The BFTB online offerings now include an online rural tourism directory called Stay In The Bush (SITB) and the BFTB Marketplace, an e-commerce marketplace launched in October 2020 with support from PayPal. More than 1,200 rural small businesses have applied to sell on the Marketplace and 250 businesses onboarded. The website has hosted users from 100 different countries and processed more than 50,000 transactions.

The use of Instagram and Facebook has allowed BFTB to reach both domestic and global customers. In partnership with Meta, we have been able to offer upskilling and training for regional business owners. We began with the support of volunteers but have now transitioned into a business that sustains the part-time employment of five rural women. Our organisation is just one example of what is possible when people invest in small businesses in the bush.

Our success is helping to change mindsets. In the past, 'the bush' has been synonymous with a farmer - usually a man - in a paddock. It 'trends' only in times of crisis. BFTB shifts the focus toward potential instead of pity and invites investment in regional Australia. It celebrates the talent and ingenuity of rural makers, creators, artists and retailers launching and scaling businesses from 'the middle of nowhere' - predominantly these enterprises are female-led.

As we emerge from the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that small business in rural Australia remains visible and accessible. Bush businesses - if enabled - are well positioned to leverage opportunities arising from a post-pandemic world and will undoubtedly play a critical role in rebuilding the Australian economy.

Our hope is that off-farm, women-led enterprises continue to grow and contribute layers of diversity and opportunity to rural Australia. Further, that BFTB can continue to forge a meaningful and permanent connection between the city and the bush. In doing so, we believe we can help to crisis-proof rural Australia.

Grace Brennan
Founder

Key figures



\$9 million
revenue for rural
small businesses



550,000
followers across
Facebook and
Instagram



50,000
transactions
processed



250
businesses
onboarded



Executive summary

Buy From The Bush: Harnessing the power of digital tools to create lasting change in rural Australia explores the experiences and needs of rural and remote small to medium businesses (SMBs). It documents the positive impact of Buy From The Bush (BFTB) on these businesses, which are predominantly female led, and the flow-on benefits to the local economy and community.

The Report draws on three main sources:

- A study commissioned by BFTB, conducted by market research specialists, YouGov.
- Data from the BFTB online Marketplace.
- Surveys of BFTB followers conducted via Instagram stories.

Buy From The Bush fosters the growth of female-led business which diversifies regional economies

BFTB has shown how digital tools like social media can empower entrepreneurs, and in particular women, to launch and scale business from remote communities.

YouGov found that seven in ten (70%) rural SMB respondents agree that online/digital businesses have helped women in the regions gain economic security. Almost seven in ten (69%) rural SMB respondents agree that digital businesses present opportunities for rural communities to grow.

Digitally-enabled small businesses can crisis-proof rural communities

BFTB was launched on Instagram when regional Australia was in the grip of one of the worst droughts on record. Soon afterwards, the global Covid-19 pandemic arrived and made the notion of crisis-proofing economies even more relevant to all Australians.

More than six in ten (62%) SMB owners and managers agree that digitally enabled SMBs can help to crisis-proof rural communities.

In addition to showcasing rural talent, BFTB leverages a consumer trend towards shopping with ethical purpose. We found 97% of surveyed BFTB Instagram followers said when they shopped with BFTB they were 'motivated by helping to crisis-proof rural communities.'

Buy From The Bush is broadening people's perception of rural Australia beyond the farm gate

BFTB has created a powerful platform to showcase the breadth of enterprise in regional communities and drive new growth in non-traditional industries like e-commerce. The BFTB brand has given half a million followers insight into the quality and diversity of businesses available in rural communities. This produces tangible economic benefit.

In response to our Instagram survey, 70% of BFTB followers said the business had changed their perception of rural communities. Over the past twelve months, social media drove 36% of all users to the BFTB website, proving the potential of social platforms as a key marketing funnel.

Case studies outlined in the Report confirm the positive flow-on effect of BFTB, in the form of local employment opportunity, economic empowerment and meaningful investment in rural communities.

Buy From The Bush: Harnessing the power of digital tools to create lasting change in rural Australia

At a glance

Buy From The Bush promotes the growth of female-led businesses which diversify regional economies



generated over **\$9 million in revenue** for rural small businesses.¹¹



rural SMB respondents agree that **online/digital businesses have helped women in the regions gain economic security**.¹²



rural SMB respondents agree that **digital businesses present opportunities for rural communities to grow**.¹³



of BFTB businesses are owned by women, compared to the national small business average of 34%.¹⁴

Digitally-enabled small businesses can crisis-proof rural communities



of rural SMB respondents believe **SMBs are critical for regional communities**.¹⁵



REASONS INCLUDE

85% provide jobs/employment opportunities for local people

74% improve the quality of life for local residents

72% help to create a vibrant community

66% provide economic opportunities

61% attract investment into the region

40% help to encourage migration to the bush

Social media and websites have been the most helpful tools for rural SMB respondents during a crisis:



are most likely to be nominated by regional and rural SMB owners and managers as the **digital tools that helped their business stay operational during a crisis**.¹⁶



SMB owners and managers agree that **digitally enabled SMBs can help to crisis-proof rural communities**.¹⁷



surveyed BFTB followers said when **they shopped with BFTB they were 'motivated by helping to crisis-proof rural communities'**.¹⁸

Buy From The Bush is broadening people's perception of rural Australia's potential beyond the farm gate



of surveyed BFTB followers said **BFTB had changed their perception of rural communities**.¹⁹



Social media drove 36% of all users to the BFTB website in the last 12 months.²⁰

11 Buy From The Bush Marketplace data, 2022. 12 Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021. 13 Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021. 14 AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2022; Profile of Australian Women in Business – ABS and Office for Women (2015), cited in Economic Impact Evaluation: Buy From The Bush, AlphaBeta Australia, June 2020, p14. 15, 16, 17 Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021. 18 Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 632 respondents, 26 October 2021. 19 Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 630 respondents, 26 October 2021. 20 Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 630 respondents, 26 October 2021.



SECTION 1

Buy From The Bush fosters the growth of female-led business which diversifies regional economies



Buy From The Bush fosters the growth of female-led business which diversifies regional economies.

Key figures



97%

BFTB businesses are owned by women, compared to the national small business average of 34%.



70%

Seven in ten (70%) of rural SMB respondents agree that **online/digital businesses have helped women in the regions gain economic security**.



69%

Almost seven in ten (69%) of rural SMB respondents agree that **digital businesses present opportunities for rural communities to grow**.

The YouGov study makes it clear that women in rural Australia have been able to share in the commercial success generated by digitally-enabled businesses like BFTB.

In the YouGov analysis, almost seven in ten (70%) rural SMB respondents agree that online/digital businesses have helped women in the regions gain financial security.¹ This is an exciting development in rural Australia, where commercial opportunities have traditionally been limited.

BFTB has been the supportive framework to ensure women entrepreneurs have what they need to get started. 97% of businesses featured on BFTB are female-led.² BFTB uses digital platforms like Instagram and Facebook to grow and promote these businesses, building a bridge for digital entrepreneurship. The low barrier to entry of social media platforms means that talented female founders can easily launch and scale business from remote communities.

This type of female-led business structure offers a genuine opportunity to diversify revenue streams for rural households.

The research shows almost seven in ten (69%) rural SMB respondents agree that digital businesses present opportunities for rural communities to grow.³ Online businesses offer not only economic security for rural women but opportunities for professional development. The greater the income earned by women working in rural Australia, the greater the diversity and growth in their local economy, and the greater the prosperity and resilience of the local community.

¹ Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021.

² AlphaBeta survey analysis – results from period Oct 2019 to Feb 2020; Profile of Australian Women in Business – ABS and Office for Women (2015), cited in Economic Impact Evaluation: Buy From The Bush, AlphaBeta Australia, June 2020, p14.

³ Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021.



Photos by Abbie Mellé.

From side-hustle to full time gig: economic empowerment and local investment

“Since running my own business, I found it so empowering to turn my side business into something that can support myself and my partner”

Emily Burton

Emily Burton designs and creates pearl jewellery for her label, Peggy & Twig. Her interest in jewellery had always been a hobby while she pursued a teaching career in the regional centre of Orange, NSW. Emily's connection to Western NSW strengthened as she would regularly travel to Trangie to see her partner and visit his family farm.

Emily created a profile on Instagram to showcase her pearl jewellery designs which were loved by women across many generations for their timeless yet sophisticated aesthetic.

In October 2019, Peggy & Twig was featured on BFTB's social media campaign. It was an immediate success. Online sales surged with hundreds of orders from people across the country and internationally including the UK and France.

The growth of online sales and a growing list of stockists instilled the confidence for Emily to resign from her teaching position and made the permanent move to live with her partner on the farm in Trangie. Since then, Emily has employed six people to meet the fast growth of her business and also invested in her community by opening a flagship retail store in the main street of Trangie.

In doing so, she is breathing new life into a vacant, old building and improving the town's streetscape. This dedicated studio space will allow Emily to grow Peggy & Twig to include more ranges and employ more people, both locally and remotely.

 /peggyandtwig



Photos by Clancy Paine.

Career opportunity: ripple effects of growth

“Buy From The Bush was crucial to help rural local businesses and communities because it had this incredible ripple effect. Had these businesses not stayed open, people would have left town, post offices wouldn’t have stayed open and the communities would have suffered.”

Emma Barrett

Branding consultant Emma Barrett runs her branding agency from Dubbo, NSW, and the success of BFTB created a unique opportunity for Emma.

As the BFTB campaign gathered pace, she noticed more regional businesses wanting to move online to tap into the digital economy. These businesses had gained traction from BFTB and were inspired to enhance their digital presence and scale up.

Emma launched her own creative design business supporting other small business owners with their digital marketing. She worked with startups to create vibrant and effective visual branding for their Instagram and Facebook accounts and websites, helping them build their own business and reach more customers.

She was featured on the BFTB Instagram page and received a number of clients as a result. But there was an indirect benefit also. Female founders in her community gained new business confidence owing to the success of the campaign and required her services to grow their businesses.

This demand meant that in 18 months, Emma scaled from a one-woman business to a team of four. She was so successful that she outgrew the home office.

With more revenue and new colleagues, Emma was able to realise a dream of creating a rural creative space. She launched *Creater*, a coworking hub for like-minded business founders and creative thinkers to collaborate and exchange ideas.

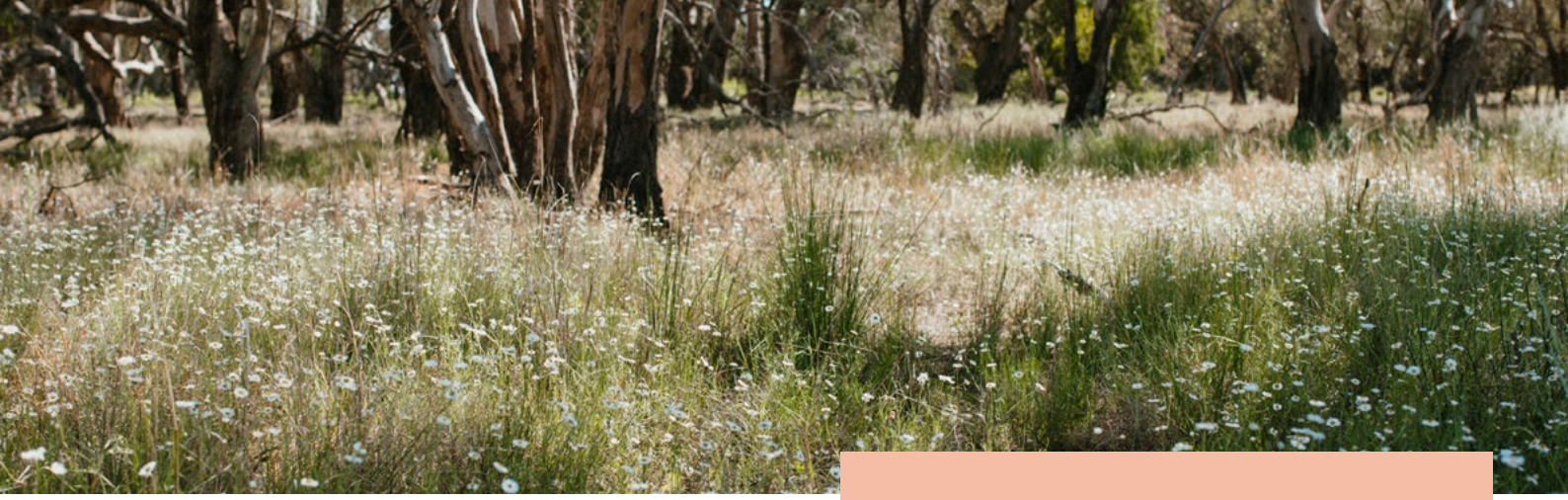
As micro and small businesses position themselves to compete in a digital economy there are tangible benefits for creative and professional service providers across regional Australia.

 /emmanatecreative

SECTION 2

Digitally-enabled small businesses can crisis-proof rural communities





Digitally-enabled small businesses can crisis-proof rural communities

BFTB was born out of a crisis at the tail end of a crippling drought in New South Wales. During this period, many farming families were supported by income generated outside of agriculture. In fact, 97% of surveyed BFTB followers said when they shopped with BFTB they were ‘motivated by helping to crisis-proof rural communities.’⁴

Agriculture in Australia has always been - and will always be - subject to the cycle of weather and natural disasters like drought and flood.

This makes digitally-enabled small business crucial to crisis-proofing bush communities through building diverse and sustainable income streams.

The YouGov research supports this. It reveals that SMB respondents said social media (57%) and websites (53%) have been the most helpful digital tools for regional & rural businesses to build resilience.⁵

More than six in ten (62%) SMB respondents agree that digitally enabled SMBs can help to crisis-proof rural communities.⁶ SMBs are seen as essential for rural communities to function and survive because of their contribution to local employment and economic opportunities.

The internet and associated technology allows SMBs to connect with more customers outside of their immediate community, which helps drive online sales and makes businesses less reliant on local foot traffic.

SMBs make-up a majority of Australia’s economy so it is vital they have the right tools to withstand future challenges.

4 Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 632 respondents, 26 October 2021.

5 Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021.

6 Buy From The Bush, YouGov Research, n=>307, September 2021.

Key figures



96%

of rural SMB respondents believe **SMBs are critical for regional communities**



REASONS INCLUDE



85%

provide jobs/ employment opportunities for local people



74%

improve the quality of life for local residents



72%

help to create a vibrant community



66%

provide economic opportunities



61%

attract investment into the region



40%

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Social media and websites have been the most helpful tools for rural SMB respondents during a crisis:



53%

websites helped their business stay operational during a crisis



57%

social media helped their business stay operational during a crisis



97%

surveyed BFTB followers said when they shopped with BFTB they were **‘motivated by helping to crisis-proof rural communities’**



Growth in a crisis: Perenniale Plants breathes new life into Canowindra

“Opening the emporium has created so much goodwill from the people in our town, and everyone is so grateful. We would never have taken the risk to expand if it wasn’t for what happened with Buy From The Bush.”

Chris Cuddy

Chris Cuddy has always loved the outdoors and gardening.

His nursery business in the central west NSW town of Canowindra propagated and sold drought and frost-resistant plants, perfect for rural climates. In 2019, the business was under severe strain owing to worsening drought.

A number of years earlier, Chris had added bespoke gardening merchandise to his e-commerce store – Perenniale Plants – which he promoted via Facebook and Instagram.

Chris’ innovative approach caught the eye of BFTB and after being featured, his online sales increased in the lead up to Christmas. Even after the feature, demand for Chris’ business kept growing through the pandemic leading to an increase in sales by a staggering 1400%.

The business growth experienced through online channels, including BFTB, allowed Chris and his wife Nerida to buy an empty, rundown building on the main street of Canowindra. They worked with local tradespeople and consciously sourced building materials locally, injecting much needed cash back into the town. In April 2021, as economies around the world contracted, the Cuddys opened the site with a new plant emporium, café and nursery.

As a result, 14 new jobs have also been created within the business, expanding the economic growth to families in the region. Their nursery and emporium is now used for cultural events like live music, rounding out Chris’s vision for his business to be a core part of the local community.



Photos by Stephanie Hunter.

 /perenniale_plants



Collective success: The Riverland producer finds customers all over Australia

“We want to share our produce with everyone around Australia, and Buy From The Bush has been the backbone for making this possible.”

Sue Heward

2021 was meant to be a big year for Sue Heward. The orchard her family owned was planning to celebrate its centenary, and her business Singing Magpie Produce (a gourmet food business) was due to expand its manufacturing capabilities. However in late 2020, Sue was diagnosed with cancer and had to put these plans on hold.

While Sue was recovering, she found working in her business part-time as a mental reprieve from her treatment. She kept her followers updated via Instagram, and the BFTB Marketplace continued to help drive online sales which now makes up 80% of her total revenue.

This allowed Sue to hire three extra people to allow Singing Magpie Produce to continue to grow. While this year has been one of the most challenging for Sue, she is making strides in her recovery and is re-focussed on expanding her business.

The growth of her business has also had a profound impact on others in the Riverland. Sue has become a major buyer of premium quality Riverland produce, and this year alone processed over 5 tonnes of local produce to keep up with online demand.

Her supply chain consists of other local businesses such as fruit pickers, transport services and packaging goods, so the success of Sue’s business is collectively shared with other regional businesses.



Photo by Meaghan Coles (top) and Sue Heward (Bottom).

[/sue_singingmagpieproduce](https://www.instagram.com/sue_singingmagpieproduce)

SECTION 3

**Buy From The Bush is broadening
people's perception of rural
Australia beyond the farm gate**



Buy From The Bush is broadening people's perception of rural Australia beyond the farm gate.

BFTB's success and extraordinary reach has reframed the story that is told about the bush.

The narrative has been flipped from hardship and 'bush battlers' to one that celebrates ingenuity, creativity and vibrancy in the bush. By marketing a 'bush brand' aligned with a message of quality, craftsmanship and innovation, it will help to foster further investment in rural and regional Australia.

In a recent BFTB Instagram poll 70% of respondents said BFTB had changed their perception of rural communities.⁷ These changes perceptions are depicted on page 15.

BFTB itself, as well as many of the rural businesses showcased on the BFTB Marketplace, has been featured across the big mastheads of broadcast and print media in Australia. It has been featured in magazines like Vogue and Marie Claire and on popular digital media like Mamamia which has access to an audience of at least five million Australian women⁸. This kind of media coverage is important for brand building, awareness raising and reaching new customers.

The use of social media storytelling by BFTB is fostering a greater connection between the city and the bush. In the engaged online community, followers are getting a deeper understanding of bush businesses and, in turn, rural retailers are thriving on the increased exposure. This stronger connection is a crucial mechanism to allow micro businesses in the bush to better service metropolitan audiences.

Over half a million people follow BFTB and SITB across social media, which has helped to drive tangible financial benefits for rural businesses. In the last 12 months, social media drove 36% of all users to the BFTB website.⁹

On average, 32% of all e-commerce transactions were driven by social media, a trend that has continued to grow through a period of national economic decline and has been an essential lifeline to bush businesses.¹⁰

These economic outcomes demonstrate the commercial potential of updating the bush narrative.

From the outback to the runway



"Vogue Australia has long been a champion of female entrepreneurship, and our Vogue Codes initiative, launched in 2016, aims to inspire young women to embrace digital technologies

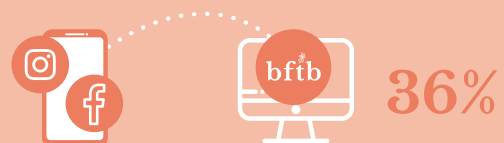
and careers. Grace Brennan spoke at our virtual 2020 event and recorded a Vogue Codes podcast with us about the inception of Buy From The Bush and her hopes for scaling the movement to create even more impact. In 2021, we created a Vogue Codes Country event to showcase rural and regional entrepreneurs and to share their stories in our print magazine and online. We were incredibly impressed with the women who took part in our event and with the response from our audience, and we hope to build on our relationships in the bush in future."

Edwina McCann, Editor-in-chief, Vogue Australia.

Key figures



of surveyed BFTB followers said **BFTB had changed their perception of rural communities**



Social media drove 36% of all users to the BFTB website in the last 12 months

⁷ Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 630 respondents, 26 October 2021.

⁸ Source: Mumbrella Australia <https://mumbrella.com.au/mamamia-reports-record-audiences-in-2020-616522>.

⁹ Buy From The Bush Marketplace data, 2021.

¹⁰ Buy From The Bush Marketplace data, 2021.

Changed perceptions



Buy From The Bush Instagram poll, 632 respondents, 26 October 2021.



Photo by Stephanie Hunter (top) and Dara Munnis (Bottom).

Attracting celebrity customers and reinventing the bush retail experience

“A Buy From The Bush business is like a gold standard tick of approval. It shows everyone that this business in the bush is exciting and something you should know about.”

Laura Hall

Laura Hall is a hatmaker to Hollywood stars and artists from across the world, all from her studio in Scone, NSW.

Celebrities like Elsa Pataky and Delta Goodrem have all been snapped in PHYLLi Designs hats and have then gone on to share their purchases on social media, organically increasing business awareness and growth.

In fact PHYLLi Designs was started as a creative outlet at night, as a release from the 9-5 grind.

Laura was working in the city but moved home to country NSW to be closer to her family. There, she focussed on her Instagram account showcasing her hats and even offered online “hat parties” which have attracted attendees from Tokyo, America and across Australia.

BFTB featured the business in 2020. The business received an influx of attention from leading fashion media and boutiques keen to stock her products.

In 2021 Laura decided to open a flagship store in Scone that reinvented the retail experience with a beautiful and interactive space. PHYLLi Designs now employs six people (including Laura), who help manage the store, run the social media and online customer service outlet and of course make her signature designs.

The creation of these jobs has allowed Laura to upskill locals within the community in textiles, business and digital marketing, many of whom are working mums or students studying part-time.

Businesses like PHYLLi Designs show that you can successfully scale up a business from rural Australia. It is also proof that momentum created online can have real and tangible benefits for local communities, like the tourists who are travelling to Scone specifically to visit the PHYLLi Designs retail store.

 /phyllidesigns

Buy From The Bush: Harnessing the power of digital tools to create lasting change in rural Australia, was created by Buy From The Bush in partnership with Meta. Since 2019, Buy from the Bush and Meta have been working together to showcase rural and regional small businesses across Australia giving them the tools, training and resources to grow and thrive.



Photos by Clancy Paine of Narromine, NSW



For more information:

Grace Brennan

grace@buyfromthebush.com.au

www.buyfromthebush.com.au

The logo for 'buy from the bush' is contained within a circular orange-red background. The word 'buy' is in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with a small floral icon to its right. Below 'buy' is the phrase 'from the' in a smaller, lowercase font. The word 'bush' is in a larger, lowercase, sans-serif font at the bottom of the circle.

buy 
from the
bush