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AUTUMN 2021

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organic

featuring

PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM
Supporting small scale farmers. **pg10**

WOMEN IN REGEN
Stories from 4 Sisters of Soil. **pg13**

SUSTAINABILITY & WINE
A focus on the McLaren Vale region. **pg22**

HERBICIDE FREE CAMPUS
Youth-led organisation inspiring the next generation. **pg26**

ORGANIC INSIGHTS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AUSTRALIA

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Alex Mitchell
/ NASAA GM

MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Welcome to Autumn! I can almost hear the collective sigh of relief from the community as we move out of another challenging summer season, with the risk of bushfire hanging heavily over the entire Nation.

As we all know, Western Australia and other areas in our States have again suffered from loss of homes and property, only 12 months on from the 'Black Summer' bushfires, the trauma of past seasons resonates strongly.

For those who have been affected, know that we all stand strong with you.

Many of you now head into a 'new normal' faced with different decisions and pathways to recovery. The challenges of managing properties coming out of fire, drought and floods, add to the many demands of the 'normal' day to day farming. Land management, property planning, labour issues, business and supply chain continuity are now interwoven issues that our farming community are having to consider.

In our continuing series of celebrating "30 years plus" ...our longstanding operators have had to face more than a few issues of their own over the years. We hope their stories are a breath of hope and encouragement to those just starting their road to recovery.

We are also excited to bring you a special feature on Women in Regenerative Agriculture. Figures show that the number of women in farming is growing, a far cry from the days when we were not allowed to claim the status of farmer at all in Australia (only in 1994 were we enlightened!).

The four outstanding women interviewed reveal what it takes to challenge the status quo and make the transition to greater sustainability, with each having come to their passion and goals in different ways. In highlighting these journeys, we celebrate the many women who are now working to provide resources to the farming community in Regenerative Agriculture.

No individual, or organisation, has been untouched by the ever-present COVID disruptions, which have permanently changed the way businesses and the community operate. To then be asked to consider and engage in the broader machinations of industry coordination and development feels unreasonable. This is where NASAA Organic has an integral role in representing the issues and concerns of our organic and biodynamic industry.

The importance of formal structures and processes through which we represent the interest of organic producers in our relations with government are varied - with input on issues ranging from standards development, domestic regulation,

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export controls, biosecurity and GM crops, to chemical regulation and the connection to community health.

We support Federal MP David Littleproud's announcement in December of the formation of an Organic Industry Group, as the issue of regulatory reform to underpin integrity in domestic certification is finally being taken seriously. Whilst the process is not an open one that invites public consultation at this stage, we remain hopeful that this will be invited at the next steps of policy development.

The Commonwealth Government currently has many public consultation processes in place, and we continue to provide significant input through the formal Public Consultation Frameworks, and in advocacy to Government, engaging directly with those who develop and draft policy affecting our greater industry.

These processes may seem at arm's length from the immediate challenges on farm, but underpin our entire quality system, and ultimately, consumer confidence in organic.

Alex Mitchell

ONCE AGAIN, WE TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT IT TAKES TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE OPERATION OVER THREE DECADES OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC MANAGEMENT.

30 years and (still) counting.

WITH TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS STILL FIRMLY IN PLACE, WE TAKE A VICARIOUS LOOK AT THE WILDLY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF OUR INTERNATIONAL GROWER GROUPS IN PNG AND SRI LANKA, WHOSE OPERATIONS FORM THE BACKBONE OF SUSTAINABLE LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Coffee Connections

HIGHLAND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVE (HOAC) COFFEE GROWERS

Eastern Highlands region of PNG

www.coffeeconnectionspng.com

Liz Clay

BAW BAW ORGANICS

Noojoo, in the Baw Baw Shire, West Gippsland

www.facebook.com/BawBawOrganics

Marg & Jason Alexandra

HAZELDEAN FARM

Ellinbank, located at the base of the Strzelecki Ranges

www.hazeldeanforestfarm.com

Stassen Natural Foods (Pvt) Ltd

AN ESTABLISHED TEA EXPORTER, FOUNDED IN 1977

Sri Lanka

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COFFEE CONNECTIONS

Craig McConaghy MBE, Managing Director of Coffee Connections, and representative to the Highland Organic Agriculture Cooperative (HOAC) coffee growers, has been active in the coffee growing communities of PNG's Eastern Highlands since 1984.

Craig was originally stationed in the region as an Australian government patrol officer or "kiap" as it was locally known since the early 1970's. Having developed a local network, he later entered the coffee industry with one of PNG's largest coffee producers at the time.

In partnership with then colleague and PNG National Henry Ame, he later set out to establish a unique coffee supply chain, with the establishment of organic certification through NASAA and development of the HOAC co-operative movement. As coffee growing was already done with little artificial input, Craig saw the opportunity early on to certify organic, to meet a growing, high value demand globally.

Today, the HOAC growers' production zone spans a combined area of more than 5,000 hectares, with some 3,500 participating farmers. On average over the past five years, 2,000 tons of certified green bean organic coffee has been exported annually, which is only a small percentage of PNG's total coffee production but in the higher value category.

"Under the banner of Coffee Connections, we currently export to the US, UK, EU (Germany), Australia and New Zealand, and have enjoyed long-standing relationships with our customers," says Craig.

"Our market has grown as our customers' markets have grown, and organic management, combined with our Fairtrade certification, has provided the maximum benefit in terms of price premium advantage," he says.

Challenges were inherent from the outset in the very nature of PNG culture, having emerged from its history as a feudal society, with localised tribes divided by mountainous terrain and river streams, and with barriers of communication (there are an estimated 800+ languages spoken within local village groups).

According to Craig, ensuring coordination and trust in the system was key to securing cooperative participation.

Early on, a group of 22 inspectors were selected to undertake internal audits of the cooperative's Internal Control System (ICS) – the critical quality management system underpinning grower group certification, representing clan and village groupings within the growing area.

"Of most importance was that each individual is a respected and trusted member of their local community," says Craig.

"This approach has worked very well in building confidence, and we've had minimal issues over the years," he says.

"If you think that some of these tribes were enemies in the old days, this is a massive achievement."

"We've found that being part of a cooperative has, in fact, helped break down some barriers and bring people together."

"The cooperative, following Fairtrade guidelines, shares information and makes their own decisions on the use of revenue, with some of the profits invested in upgraded equipment, such as cherry pulpers, farm tools and the like."

Craig has steered the development of the cooperative's management system from a low base to a high quality, control and traceable system. Organic inspections are undertaken annually, and both Craig, Henry and the Coffee Connections management team continue to play a role in mentoring, assisting, and advising on the ICS.

"I admire the certification inspectors that come to PNG and appreciate that it is an eye-opening experience," says Craig.

"They've taken it all in with great interest in our operation and, in turn, have been treated with respect."

Under the guidance of Craig and Henry, the cooperative has built a strong local management team to take over the important functions of quality and logistics.

As local capacity grows, Craig is hoping to step back more and more into a consultative role for the group.

"I'm still involved, predominantly in client business development and contract management," he says.

"We have identified, though, local individuals who can be trained to take on more of this role."

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"Many in PNG have never had the opportunity to operate in a global business capacity, travelling overseas and the like – and, there is still a way to go, to ensure that customers continue to have confidence in the company that they are dealing with."

Logistics, and particularly the road access network to town and port, have been, and continue to be challenging. Roads are poorly maintained, and transport routes are frequently hazardous.

"To give some idea.... Generally, when it's dry, the trip from Goroka main centre to Purosa (96 kms) and our most distant growers can take around 4 hours, "says Craig.

"After heavy rains, however, that journey can be extended considerably, on one occasion taking 16 hours!"

The company buys the best four-wheel drive vehicles available, but Government support on infrastructure development and road maintenance is the key.

"The local folk, however, are very patient people and accept it as the normal way of things," says Craig.

"They are reconciled to just wait."

Craig believes that the buyer understanding of the unique local challenges presented in PNG, go a long way to fostering an understanding, that the route to market, may not always be as expedient, or as instantaneous as expected. Nevertheless, the company has never failed to deliver.

"There are some challenges here, including with the documentation side, that we still need to work with," he says.

"For this reason, if we were to look to increase current production levels, then we would be looking at introducing a whole new level of management, a greater level of internal coordination....we would have to overcome these logistical impediments, and I believe we aren't ready for it."

"It's the law of diminishing returns... and really, I believe we are operating in our sweet spot now."

"Our operation is currently sustainable, the market is strong, and premium returns are providing benefits to our growers," he says.

"This is the reward that we were looking for when we first started Coffee Connections."

> "I admire the certification inspectors that come to PNG and appreciate that it is an eye-opening experience,"
>
> Craig McGonaghy

LIZ CLAY **BAW BAW ORGANICS**

Liz Clay has had deep involvement in the organic industry over the last 3 decades as an organic farmer, consultant, and former IFOAM Board member.

She and her business partner Wally Brown manage their permaculture inspired, 8-hectare Piedmont Farm in Noojoo, in the Baw Baw Shire, West Gippsland, growing a broad mixture of vegetables, specialising in potatoes, as well as raspberries, strawberries and other fruits.

Certified organic farming has been a life journey for Liz, and a passion that is an expression of her strong interest in natural resource management.

"I've had lots of sources of inspiration along the way," she says.

Her father, Freddy Clay, was an incredible early influence.

"He was a second-generation market gardener, and I grew up listening to him talk about the importance of soil," she says.

Later, Liz cites the late Rod May as an inspiration and visionary of someone who is sadly missed.

"He was someone who was not afraid to have an alternate view to the dominant paradigm," she says.

"Both Rod and Jan [Denham] provided much support over the years, particularly in my later role as an IFOAM Board Member [from 1998-2005]."

"Along with Rod and Jan, NASAA itself as an organisation has also been an inspiration; having a truly ethical approach, and with ongoing involvement in the International movement."

Liz says that her time with IFOAM was also rewarding, particularly in seeing the support of developing nations, and being able to see how "organics can enable whole communities."

"Marg and Jason Alexandra, who are located quite close by, have also been inspiring, with their big ideas and adherence to permaculture principles," she says.

Being a small producer has presented challenges for Liz.

"We've been challenged in that we are sometime classed as 'hobby farmers', and not considered as 'real' farmers, which doesn't reflect the important role and productivity of small farmers" she says.

"My body certainly tells me I'm farming!"

"It's been challenging in that we (small farmers) can be overlooked when it comes to Government funding," she says.

Liz says that if she wasn't certified organic, she doubts she would be farming.

"Being certified organic has enabled me to participate in the marketplace and achieve a fair price," she says.

The growth in Farmers Markets has also been a boon for small farmers.

"For small producers like us, farmers markets have really been the icing on the cake, "says Liz.

"Previously, I was supplying to a wholesaler, but found that I was being squeezed out of the market by bigger players."

Liz co-founded the Baw Baw Food Hub as a mechanism to bring together small producers in the local area for trade, but it was really the growth in Farmers Markets in the 2000's that provided more locally based opportunities.

"It provided a system for small producers to sell direct and cut out the middleman, which means we can return a sustainable profit," she says.

Liz says that Farmers Markets have also played an incredibly important role, in bridging the disconnect between food production, farmers and the consumer.

"It has been a celebration and appreciation of small farm and artisan product," she says.

"I love it! It's a real social outing. I have loyal followers that I get to meet from Melbourne."

"Farming in general is incredibly hard work, but it's great to be around people that appreciate what you do."

"Love what you do. Be proud of what you do. And, enjoy the lessons along the way!"

Liz Clay

MARG & JASON ALEXANDRA **HAZELDEAN FARM**

From little things, big things really do grow.

Hazeldean Farm grew out of the principles and philosophies that Marg and Jason Alexandra originally employed, in the running of a small tree and plant nursery designed to supply a diversity of species for revegetation.

The couple had a vision to apply their learnings to create a larger scale model for sustainable agro ecology.

"We wanted to demonstrate what we were talking about in terms of revegetation, and building woodlots," says Marg, "and the nursery essentially became the powerhouse, and enterprise that enabled us to develop the property."

For Marg, the purchase of the 93-acre farm at Ellinbank, located at the base of the Strzelecki Ranges, also meant a return to her origins, and living closer to her aging parents. The property, which Marg described as a "green desert" had previously been used for dairy cows and comprised only pastureland, with no trees except a sparse outcrop along a creek line.

Fast forward three decades, and with the application of principles of permaculture, agro-ecology systems and regenerative farming techniques, the property is now an oasis of diverse plantings, habitats, and a highly productive orchard.

"Before, there were virtually no birds!" says Marg, "and, now the birdlife is incredible, we have many unique species visiting, as well as microbats."

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The main focus for production is apples, with around 3,000 trees of 40 different varieties grown, including 10 dedicated cider apple species, which are processed for apple cider (sparkling apple) and apple cider vinegar. The farm supplies fresh apples and other fruits to Melbourne and local markets – primarily distributed through CERES Fairfood and Organic Angels (both home box delivery services), as well as farmers markets, and speciality wholesale and retail outlets.

In the initial stages, the couple concentrated on changing the structure of the farm by planting trees - carefully placed windbreaks, fodder and timber trees – and constructing a four-acre dam, with shallows and islands for habitat.

"We were seen as crackpots at the time. First, we were planting areas to trees, taking up valuable cropland. Next, we were going organic!" says Marg.

Over the years, however, the couple have seen a real shift to organic, with dedicated land under organic management now extending "right to the ridge of the Strzelecki Range."

"We are bordering the peri-urban area of Melbourne, and direct transport links have improved," says Marg. "We have seen more young people coming into the area, realising that they can commute to the city. There is a number of artisan organic wine, bread and cheesemakers establishing."

Ceres Fairfood are the biggest buyer of farm's produce, and the couple also sell through selected retailers, including the innovative Prom Coast Food Collective box scheme.

Marg says that these alternate networks are 'synergistic' when compared to the wholesale market, which doesn't necessarily want to deal with large numbers of small-scale producers.

"We've been fortunate through the pandemic, as organic sales through these networks have literally quadrupled," she says.

Whilst there has been a surge in consumer awareness, Marg says that "People are happy to do the organic thing, but aren't necessarily looking for certified, they are buying on trust."

She sees certification as important for protection, but highlights that the organic industry itself has suffered from infighting and a lack of representation to Government, "which has been to our detriment." She calls for an independent peak body.

An early role model for Marg was an Aunty who was dedicated to growing "everything possible" on her land.

She also cites Phil Rowe and Cathy Taylor as particularly inspiring over the years.

"At the time, they were really the only ones who were doing something similar to us," she says.

"If we felt fatigued from our efforts, we would visit Phil and Cathie's berry farm, up in the hills nearby and feel inspired again."

Fatigue was something that was ever-present in the beginning, with two babies at the time, and with Jason having to work off farm.

"Our focus has always been on diversity, rather than the bulk varieties," says Marg.

"But, with diversity, comes a lot of work," adds Jason.

"You are dealing with a lot of different issues."

"We are feeling quite established now, though," says Marg.

"We have our markets and systems in place, it's a smoother operation."

While the couple are planning to step back from the day-to-day farm operation soon, they will continue to play an active role in mentoring and consulting.

"We are open to all sorts of ideas," says Marg.

"We already have a share-profit arrangement with one person, who is growing and harvesting mushrooms (primarily shitake), grown on thinning trees from our 6-acre oak tree plantation," she says.

"We'd like the role of the farm to continue as a place of demonstration and experimentation," says Jason.

"In my consulting work, I see a lot of strategic planning documents, theoretical principles of ecology and innovation in agricultural practice," he says.

"If I reflect on our 30-year journey, our sense of achievement comes from the actual physical restoration of the land, the process of creation and immersion. Tree plantations are functioning as forests - we are seeing a great diversity of bird species."

"This gives us confidence that these methods work and can generate returns. Being able to demonstrate benefit; It's very satisfying!

Further Information

hazeldeanforestfarm.com

Hazeldean Farm (and Marg) recently starred in an episode of the Rose Street Pantry, a founding series that NASAA Organic sponsored, which aired on community television in Melbourne last year.

rosestreetpantrytv.com/episodes

Jason is also the Managing Director of Alexandra and Associates, a small sustainability focused consulting company and an independent researcher. Most of his reports and published papers are available at:

rmit.academia.edu/JasonAlexandra

CODDLING MOTH

In the early 2000's Jason and Marg gained an experimental licence to import codling moth granulosis virus to reduce the impact of this pest. It is now registered for use in Australia and available through rural supply stores. The story is documented here: Commercial control of Codling Moth

Designing solutions applying ecology and embracing innovative technology in 21st century Permaculture

STASSEN NATURAL FOODS (PVT) LTD

Tea is one of Sri Lanka's primary agricultural crops, accounting for around 2% of GDP.

The country is the World's fourth largest producer of tea, with an annual production of around 330 million kilograms, and second largest exporter. Small-scale tea plantations support the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Sri Lankans.

Stassen Export (Pvt) Ltd is an established tea exporter, founded in 1977. The company started organic production in 1985, and today oversees cultivation of some 500 hectares of land under organic management, with an annual production of around 150 tonnes exported to Europe (predominantly Germany), as well to Australia and Japan. The company has also been FairTrade certified since 1993.

Executive Director, Dr Abdul Gaffar, says the decision to cultivate organically was driven by significant customer, GEPA*, providing a guaranteed market for the company's entire production on conversion. This led to the birth of organic tea in Sri Lanka, with the country's Export Development Board granting Pioneering Status in 1997 for the project to convert tea production to organic systems. In 1987, Naturland of Germany first certified the organic tea garden.

"This was not only the first organic project in Sri Lanka but was also considered to be the first certified organic tea project in the World, says Dr Gaffar.

"We were fortunate that our marketing problem was taken care of by the assurance of GEPA to purchase our entire production, including "organic tea in conversion", says Dr Gaffar.

However, the project faced several challenges in the initial phases.

/ Continued on page 8

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/ Processing Centre

/ Vocational Training Centre

"Our first fear was whether our tea garden would survive an outbreak of disease and pests without the protection of chemical control," he says.

"Fortunately, our garden has survived under the organic cultural practices, which have created a natural ecological balance."

The company's greatest challenge, according to Dr Gaffar, was to produce tea organically, and strictly according to the standards of Organic Agriculture set out by IFOAM and the various certifying bodies.

"To get the necessary organic inputs is not easy," he says.

"For example, compost has to be made in large quantities to supply the required level of Nitrogen, important in tea cultivation to ensure good yield."

"The norm in conventional tea growing is to supply 100 kg of Nitrogen for every 1,000 kg of final tea produced."

"Though the plant takes 30 kg of Nitrogen, the rest is lost due to volatilisation, leaching etc."

"Compost on average has about 2% Nitrogen. Therefore, even to give the minimum of 30kg Nitrogen, would require 1.5 tons of compost per hectare."

"The average yield in our organic tea fields is 500 kg/hectare, while under conventional agriculture it is 1,000 kg/hectare."

Dr Gaffar says that organic tea cultivation is also labour intensive, equating to around 1.5 additional workers per hectare, when compared with conventional tea production.

"Applying the compost is not easy as it has to be buried round the bush," he says.

"There are 5,000 tea bushes per hectare. It is a messy and laborious task. On top of this, tea is grown on sloping land, which is not easily accessible."

"The drop in yield and the cost of labour makes the cost of production of organic tea almost double that of conventional tea."

"In addition, the cost of certification and other associated charges, based on Euro and Australian Dollars, forms a substantial component of the total cost of production."

"Competition from other tea producers is also increasing."

Dr Gaffar acknowledges that it is a struggle to make the project financially viable, but the company "remains committed to continue with it."

Further Information

www.stassentea.com

* GEPA is Europe's largest alternative trading organization. The abbreviation GEPA³ stands for "Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt mbH", literally meaning "Society for the Promotion of Partnership with the Third World".

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Dandelion

Thistles

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Supporting small scale farmers

Participatory Guarantee System

As highlighted by Dr Gaffar, certification costs are a key concern for many small-scale landholders, particularly in developing nations, where the cost of international certification can make up a large portion of production overheads in local dollar terms.

This has been a long-acknowledged issue within the organic sector, where producers feel that they are being 'penalised' for choosing to farm naturally. In fact, many organic growers and consumers believe that organic growing systems should be 'the norm', and that chemical users should be the ones who require strict monitoring.

During the 1990s NASAA Chairperson Tim Marshall conducted NASAA inspections and audits for grower groups in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Samoa. Here, he looks at the measures the international organic community has introduced to support smaller producers.

The history of certification globally is based on a recognised set of principles and Standards, that can be measured in terms of equivalency, facilitating global trade of organic product. To gain the government acceptance necessary for the last three decades of organic trade, the organic industry had to comply with International Standard Organisation (ISO) norms, requiring significant bureaucratic arrangements and cost.

Very small growers often complain about the cost of certification. In fact, certification fees collected from small growers have never really covered the full cost of delivering certification, which has always been subsidized by larger and more profitable growers.

Developing nations

The concept of 'grower group certification' introduced in the 1990s, was an attempt to support trade in developing nations, and to reduce the cost burden on smaller, subsistence farmers through collective management. Grower group certification applies the concept of the internal control system (ICS), and acceptance of grower group produce into the international supply chain requires a high level of compliance at the ICS audit.

ICS provides inspection and record keeping at an affordable local cost structure. The 'western' auditor then checks the ICS record system and visits a selection of farms to 'prove' the ICS records are reliable.

The grower group could suffer penalties arising from an individual's breech of requirements, so 'social policing' (watching each other) is a strong influence for compliance in grower group certification.

Grower group certification provides tea, coffee, spices and other goods into the organic market for the benefit of wealthy consumers in the west, and helps some small farmers in poor countries, but it does little to encourage development of an organic marketplace in developing countries.

Australia

To assist small growers at home, the major Australian certification bodies (CBs) did, for many years, offer a 'small growers' scheme'. These schemes varied somewhat between CBs, and over time. Early small grower's schemes required that growers be located together and run their own ICS. Later schemes reduced the inspection interval (every two years rather than every year) to lower the cost, but in doing so they did not meet ISO norms and therefore, could not be part of international trade (they could be sold only within Australia).

More recently, some CBs have ceased to offer a small grower scheme, because they were not profitable, and they required extra surveillance of the marketplace to ensure that their produce did not make its way into export supply chains. NASAA Certified Organic (NCO) still offers a small grower option, limited to production not exceeding $40,000 per year.

In recent years, because of cost of certification or unavailability of small grower's schemes, many small growers have dropped certification. Sometimes this did not matter, because small growers sold their produce by 'direct marketing' such as at farm stalls, farmers markets and to-your-door box delivery. These growers relied upon establishing a relationship of trust with their customers and operated without certification.

While some small growers still find what we call 'relationship marketing' adequate, others want

to do the right thing and submit to some form of verification. Also, as farmers markets grow in number and size, the market management needs to offer its own form of guarantee to consumers.

Unfortunately, the demise of small grower schemes did permit the rise of some attempts to offer a 'lesser' and cheaper form of certification, and these have usually fallen well short of consumer (and consumer law) expectations. In those attempts they may have tried to redefine organic, but that always resulted in misuse of the organic claim. They may have also tried to define some form of 'chemical free' claim, but failed to understand the complexity involved in making such a claim. A genuine chemical free claim is so difficult to define and guarantee, that it would inevitably be more expensive than organic certification. These schemes also raised many issues of conflict of interest. In the worst cases, they were clearly fraudulent.

An alternative form of organic verification: Participatory Guarantee Systems

The gaps described inspired a quest for a reliable alternative form of organic verification. The answer was participatory guarantee systems or PGS.

Participatory Guarantee Systems established in the developing world

In PGS, growers group together to guarantee each other. They may take on the role of inspector, in rotation, or in some cases employ a suitably qualified inspector, whose inspection reports were assessed by the group. Illiterate group members are relieved of the burden of record keeping by a collective accounting system. In such a system, there is either no cost, or minimal cost (if a local inspector is employed).

Finally, we had arrived at a system that could encourage development of a local organic market at minimal expense.

PGS actively promoted social policing (everyone keeps an eye on each other), and participation in all aspects of organisation, inspection, decision making and marketing of the PGS scheme. Some PGS are comprised entirely of producers, but ideally, they also include consumers, environmental groups, and government agencies.

It was always the intention that PGS would eventually develop to the extent that PGS produce could, perhaps through a re-certification system, or additional verification, find its way into the international trade, but this could not happen until PGS had proven itself. This final goal would eventually establish a meaningful level of self-reliance in poor countries and reduce the local cost of supplying organic produce to the west, which could be significant, especially if they required separate certifications for European, American, Japanese and Australian markets (more recently China, Korea and other countries have introduced their own certification, adding further cost and complexity for exporters). Finally, in the 2020s, some models are arising, especially in South America, that may be reliable enough to see some PGS produce moving into international organic supply chains.

IFOAM now estimates that there are at least 240 PGS initiatives in 66 countries, including 115 under development and 127 fully operational (in 43 countries), with more than 300,000 farmer members.

Applying Participatory Guarantee Systems in Australia

Demise of the CB small grower schemes has provided an opportunity for application of PGS in Australia, and several are under development, but only one is fully operational.

The phenomenal growth of farmers markets across Australia provides an obvious platform for PGS, because they are local, providing good basis for community building, and may include growers, consumers, local governments and social or environmental interest groups.

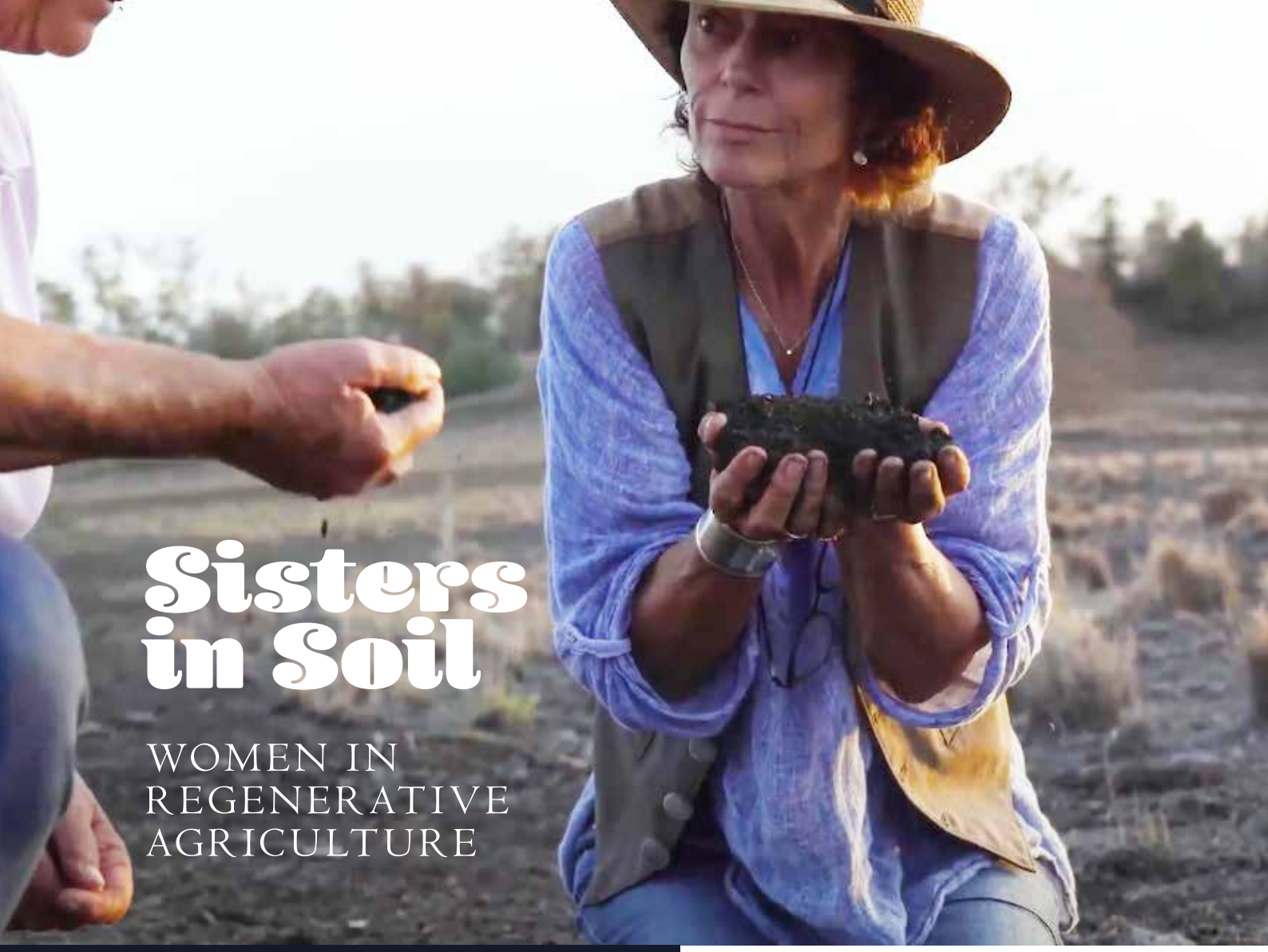
At this stage, the only functioning example of an Australian PGS is operated by the South East Coast Producers Association (SCPA, see www.scpa.org.au based around the Bega Valley, and including producers from Braidwood, Batemans Bay and Eden. It supplies markets as far away as Canberra.

Characteristics of good Participatory Guarantee Systems:

- If they make an organic claim it will be based on an existing standard (such as the AS6000 or the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products). They should not attempt to redefine or vary the generally accepted rules for organic production.
- They will encourage participation and be non-hierarchical, and they will not be privately owned or 'for profit'.
- They will almost certainly be organized around a specific region or locality, and often focused on local supply. They may be specifically focused around a market place, such as a farmer's market and local organic shops, at least initially. Some PGS may be organized around a specific commodity.
- They will be very cheap or without cost. Like any community organisation or activity they may, if they are large enough, pay for services of a coordinator or inspector, but to the greatest extent possible, they will use voluntary labour.
- It is probable that the first few working PGS will be focused on small growers, and initially it is unlikely that they will try to market through 'third parties,' such as major wholesalers and supermarkets, although this may be possible in the future, when PGS have become well established.
- To encourage their acceptance, PGS will be largely farmer run, but will also include relevant local organisations and personalities such as Slow Food, local chef celebrities, consumer advocates and environmental and health-related community organisations (including Landcare and NRM).
- PGS may provide more direct assistance to members than third-party certification, including conversion and production advice, assistance with form-filling and development of locally relevant record-keeping systems.

Importantly, PGS is offered as an 'alternative form of certification,' not as an alternative to certification, and should have many similar characteristics to 'third party' certification.

Over the last five years, several organic industry leaders have supported PGS as a viable solution for very small producers seeking verification of their practices. Recognising some early attempt to misrepresent production claims, they established an informal national PGS Council to encourage development of genuine PGS, regulate use of the term, and to ensure that the first few operating PGS are successful exemplars for others to emulate.



Sisters in Soil

WOMEN IN REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

IT WAS ONLY 26 YEARS AGO THIS YEAR THAT WOMEN EARNT THE RIGHT TO CALL THEMSELVES FARMERS IN AUSTRALIA. GASP!

STATISTICS SHOW THAT MORE AND MORE WOMEN ARE TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, ARE EMBRACING ECOLOGICALLY BASED PRACTICES ON THEIR FARMS.

This is no gender war, but whether male or female, traits associated with the feminine – instinct and nurturing, viewing systems from a holistic perspective; a focus on personal, community, and environmental health – go hand in hand with a regenerative approach.

So, let's celebrate 4 fine women of Regenerative Agriculture!

RACHEL WARD

Rachel Ward is known to many in Australia for her work as an actress, feature filmmaker and director. A self-confessed 'newbie' to regenerative agriculture, Rachel has been on a personal journey of learning over the last 18 months, with the filming of her first feature documentary, Standing on the Soilution.

It's a pathway to the future that she wants to share with the World.

The making of the documentary was driven by Rachel's acute awareness of the impacts of climate change, and growing concern for the future, brought into sharper focus with the Black Summer bushfires, and arrival of a new grandchild.

"The likely extinctions, social upheaval we will see by 2050, it's really scarey," she says.

Rachel was faced with the realisation that she could no longer offset responsibility for the perils that threaten our planet, and knowing, that as an individual, she could do something about it.

/ Continued on page 14

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"Number one, I am a Consumer; Number 2, I have a Farm and can change the way I farm and put health back into the soils and rehydrate the landscape. Thirdly, I am a Filmmaker, and I can use my voice," she says.

The result is a documentary that aims to inform and inspire viewers, with the very real and hopeful benefits of regenerative agriculture, as well as a personal journey to 'regenerate' her own farm property.

Through interviews with both conventional and regenerative farmers, the documentary poses the fundamental question of, 'what does it take to change?'

"For me, being in the Arts, it's incredibly fickle, and reinventing ourselves is something we have to do continually, I'm used to jumping from one opportunity to another," says Rachel.

"Farmers too need to be more adept to changing with the times. You can't hang on to the practices of three generations ago."

'They've got to recognise what is unsustainable and be open to reinvention."

"Sometimes it's a big event – chemical poisoning, bushfire, drought, watching the soil blow away, that makes farmers come to the realisation that they need to get out," she says.

Stumbling blocks, however, Rachel acknowledges, are based in fear.

"Farmers are in debt with huge repayments, and practices are entrenched in generations."

"As Charlie Arnott is often quoted, "we need to change the paddock between people's ears first."

Rachel believes that game-changing inspiration and solutions will come from "the amazing network of innovative farmers out there."

"Regenerative agriculture is a most hopeful pathway; a way to address the climate change dilemma, that can be adopted quickly," she says.

"It's a reason to be excited again, and there is a fantastic, supportive community out there!"

Rachel has faith that consumers will also play a role in moving things faster.

"It's about educating the consumer to make informed food choices, and to understand the importance of identifying, and caring about, food provenance."

"Retailers play a part and have a huge opportunity in all of this. There needs to be a movement on retail shelves to recognise, and stock product from farms that embrace regenerative practices."

Rachel's own property in the Nambucca Valley has been farmed conventionally for 33 years, running beef cattle.

Her farm manager (and neighbour) was the first to point out the unsustainability of current practices, and to open up the concept of regenerative farming.

Rachel has since set out to educate herself on regenerative practices, with Alan Savoury's TED talk, a first entrée into holistic management principles, and Charles Massey's book Call of the Reed Warbler being "a life-changing read".

"It's hopeful, tried and tested, the science is verified, and it provides a blueprint of how we can move forward," she says.

"It's simple really, to step back and do less. To focus on observation in a holistic way. Letting nature take its course and working with natural systems."

Rachel admits to being "less seduced' over the years into farming, which she had always seen as a "male dominated, big tractors, big chemicals operation," but says a regenerative approach has felt like she could play more of a role.

"Regen Ag represents all those life principles: flexibility, resilience, viewing things from a holistic perspective."

"It may be more conducive to women, but there is also a whole group of what I call 'Renaissance Men' who are very tuned in to learning from the complexities of nature."

Rachel says she is on a journey to achieve a new baseline on farm.

"And, I'm continuing to learn!"

Further Information

documentaryaustralia.com.au/project/standing-on-the-soilution/

Rachel is seeking financing to support national distribution and release.

KIM DEANS

Kim Deans is no stranger to our readers, having featured in past editions of Organic Insights with her valuable advice and personal tales of farm regeneration and bushfire recovery.

"I'm so grateful that I found this path." "Had career opportunities in regenerative agriculture not opened up, I would have left the agricultural industry due to my disillusionment with industrial farming practices."

Kim's journey to consulting in regenerative agriculture has been "somewhat circuitous", and "spanning decades" but ultimately, "has all happened when I've been ready!"

Coming from a farming family, Kim always knew that she wanted to work in agriculture. However, 30 years ago, there were not as many opportunities for women in the sector that there are today.

Kim's love of agriculture led to her studying a Bachelor of Rural Science at the University of New England, where only around 30% of the students studying agricultural subjects in the late 1980's were female.

"Unsurprisingly, there were few female role models."

After completing her studies, Kim really didn't know what direction she wanted to go in.

"It wasn't a common path for women at the time, and there was not a clear career pathway" she says, "it was daunting, as there were few women in this space."

"Early in my career I frequently worked in roles I was overqualified for. As my career progressed, there have been entertaining instances where older male farmers have told me that I wouldn't know the front end of a cow from the back end of a cow (to later find out my local farming family connections and come back eating humble pie) or they have asked to speak to the new bloke, only to be told that I am the new bloke."

Marrying into a farming family in her 20's brought Kim a wealth of practical farming experience, which helped build her confidence for future career opportunities. This was also the catalyst for her awakening to regenerative practices.

Her epiphany came in observing poor crop performance, where the fertiliser rig had run out at planting in the farm's wheat fields, and marked the start of her journey of questioning conventional thinking and learning all she could, about a more holistic approach to improving soil health.

Since then, Kim has set about turning her learnings of regenerative principles into practical action. Principles that she has been applying, with her husband Angus, on their small property in the New England region of northern NSW Australia, in regenerating soil that was originally mined for tin, using managed grazing and biodynamic practices.

Turning her knowledge into a successful consultancy practice, Kim also provided regenerative agriculture coaching and education to farmers in Australia with Integrity Soils, a New Zealand based consultancy led by Nicole Masters, and has since been part of the journey of many farmers seeking a regenerative path.

As well as consulting through Integrity Soils, Kim has been a member and presenter in 'The Rural Woman' community for many years, and contributed to last year's successful establishment and delivery of the first 8-week, online foundational program, in Regenerative Agriculture for women growing food and fibre (Platefull).

"It was so successful, that we are planning to deliver three intakes through 2021," she says.

"We have had women from across the globe participating, from the US, New Zealand and Australia, each with different skillsets, and at

different stages in their regenerative journey."

Kim believes the success of the program extends far beyond the completed modules.

"We are building a supportive network of like-minded women, and empowering these women to grow in confidence, to see the value they have to offer in their own businesses and communities."

"We know that women are inherently social connectors, to home, family and community."

"So, we are building a learning eco-system and community of practice where we learn from each other."

"It's magic!"

A common theme that Kim finds, however, is that women lack confidence. Having the confidence in the vision, their value and expertise, and having the confidence to share it.

"Too often, you have women who feel they aren't qualified or don't know enough to speak," she says.

"Part of building this network has been enabling women to discover where they fit, and empowering them with the knowledge to help teach others."

Kim believes that integrating the female perspective is so important.

"There are many women interested in regenerative farming. It fits with the female perspective, with greater concerns over chemicals in the environment, and how that impacts their family's health and plays out in the community."

"Having said that, there are also many men who are embracing regenerative agriculture as well and wanting to adapt."

"At the end of the day, everyone is an individual and it's important for men and women to work together, to draw on, and integrate each other's inherent strengths."

Now that regenerative agriculture has hit a wave of popularity, Kim says (tongue in cheek) that it may be time for her to find something 'even weirder' to do.

"I feel the urge to not be 'normal', to push the boundaries again," she laughs.

But on a serious note, she does caution newcomers seeking quick answers.

"Many people are looking for someone to tell them what to do", she says.

"A regenerative approach provides the tools and practices, not the answers, it is about changing the questions we ask," she says.

"The journey is unique and individualised and requires a large degree of personal growth."

"It requires a change in the way you look at everything, to taking a holistic approach to see the connections between the farm and the financial, human and ecological aspects."

Further Information

Find out more about the Platefull program for women growing food and fibre using regenerative agriculture.

theruralwoman.com

Find out about the work Kim does with Integrity Soils here www.integritysoils.co.nz

CELIA LEVERTON

The "People Care" aspect is one of the most defining benefits of a regenerative approach, according to Celia Leverton, current President of the Regenerative Agriculture Network Tasmania (RANT), permaculture consultant and recent Churchill Scholarship recipient.

"I've been in farming for forty years," she says.

"And over that time, I've seen the incredible pressures that are placed on farmers, pressures that impact on relationships that can cause family breakdowns."

"The farming system on many levels is broken. The land and the people are suffering. Farmers are so busy they can't lift their heads. There are obvious issues with mental health. And, something needs to change."

Celia says that farmers can be paralysed in what they have always done, and that for many, particularly men, it often takes a crisis to change.

"It then almost becomes a 'heroes' journey," she says.

"Whereas, I find that women are just more naturally drawn to it, with its focus on restoring, rejuvenating, revitalising."

"The attractive thing about regenerative agriculture is the focus on the triple bottom line: the landscape health, economic health, and social health and wellbeing."

"It's really scaled up permaculture, with Allan Savory's holistic management systems and framework laid over the top."

"And, for me, it just felt right."

Celia was recently awarded a Churchill Scholarship to study regenerative agricultural systems in the US, Canada and Mexico. Her project will focus on gathering evidence-based information from visits to around 18 farms, and interviews with researchers at the Rodale Institute. It will also look at successful farmer training models.

"I was thrilled to be awarded the scholarship, but it's all rather surreal now with everything on hold with COVID," she says.

"The scholarship period will end in 2023, so I'm hoping to get over in our winter 2022, as the optimal time in the northern hemisphere."

Celia identifies the need for more information and data on the effectiveness of regenerative practices, as a key driver for change.

"All the anecdotal evidence and farmer acceptance is there, but we do need more hard baseline data to build farmer confidence, and to convince funding bodies to invest in research and extension," she says.

After convening a Regenerative Agriculture Conference in Tasmania in 2019, Celia has also been managing government funded projects through RANT throughout the state. The latest trials and workshops are in the Midlands and East Coast, which involve undertaking baseline assessments on native pasture and run country, trialling and demonstrating holistic grazing practices that have proven elsewhere, to increase landscape function, farmer profitability and wellbeing.

"We are holding workshops, setting up the initial trials, and we will take the benchmark measurements," she says.

/ Continued on page 17

"Unfortunately, our funding limitations with short term projects, means that we won't be able to look at year-on-year improvements, but our aim is to provide farmers with the knowledge, experience and expertise, and support them to compile their own bank of evidence for their context, rather than relying on outside expertise."

Celia points to some good results that are coming out of trials run by RANT and Holistic Management educator, Graeme Hand.

"There have been some excellent results over the last 12 months. We've found that the decomposing litter left on the soil surface after grazing, with high stock density and high grass utilisation (based on the gut fill of the animals), coupled with the specific recovery time for the pasture to fully recover, gives a very significant increase in water infiltration, nutrient cycling and diversity." she says.

Along with a lack of baseline data, Celia identifies that a lack of peer support may be holding farmers back from making change.

"A recent report commissioned "Graziers with Better Profitability, Biodiversity and Wellbeing" looked into the issue, and found while regenerative farmers had significantly higher levels of wellbeing and confidence, local community pressure may be slowing the uptake of alternative farming practices," she says.

This has been the focus for RANT in building a 'Communities of Practice' project, as well as supporting the delivery of the Regenerative Agricultural Mentoring Program (RAMP), a 12-month intensive mentoring program, and delivery of other webinar training programs. The group is also running a Women in Regenerative Agriculture conference during June, in Tasmania.

"At the end of the day, though, we are just a volunteer run organisation, and there needs to be more money available for grassroots organisations to support farmers, and to put the measurements, training, and support in place," says Celia.

"It shouldn't be up to the farmers, who are already under so much pressure, to take on all the risk of changing practices," she says.

"There needs to be more incentivising and multi-pronged encouragement and support. Critical to the uptake of regen practices, is also the need for demonstration properties that farmers can visit, to gain insights and confidence to make changes".

Celia says the changes in the last 5 years have been "stunning", and that the future is very positive.

"We can see the impacts of generations of farming and what it is doing to the landscape, and there is now plenty of information and evidence out there on how to address it," she says.

"It's exciting."

Further Information

www.churchilltrust.com.au

www.rant.net.au

RACHAEL TREASURE

Tasmanian Rachael Treasure is an established, best-selling author who paved the way for a whole new genre of rural women's fiction with the success of her first novel, Jillaroo.

As part of a farming family, former wool classer, working dog trainer, jillaroo, rural reporter and now regenerative farmer, Rachael's personal experiences have shaped her views of the current unsustainable state of modern industrial farming, and the urgent need to reconnect with the landscape.

These themes are interwoven through her 7 novels, with her latest book, White Horses, set on a fictional regenerative farm known as The Planet, loosely modelled on the property of Ian and Di Heggerty, pioneers of Natural Intelligence Farming, in WA.

"My books have been marketed as rural romance, or rural chick lit. But really, while couched in entertainment, all my books

/ Rachel, Daniel & Colin Seis

have a message, are well researched from a scientific perspective, and have a deep psychological core, with a focus on the desecration of the feminine in rural landscapes," she says.

Her message continues to touch a nerve with a wide audience.

"I have people emailing me or messaging me through social media every day, thanking me for my books, in opening their eyes to the possibilities," she says.

"I've had women who pass the novels on to their husbands hoping to inspire them to change their land management, or male truck drivers who listen to my audio books on the long haul, and write to me with their thanks."

"There is enough of what I call the 'Hi-Vis' lifestyle in there to give my books entertainment value, but enough to start to open minds at a subliminal level."

Rachael's personal experiences have bolstered her belief that "there needs to be a feminine uprising in food production."

"It's taken me 20 years of personal growth, despite the success of my books, to have the confidence to stand-up and feel that I have the right to deliver the message," she says.

"Women are shoved into a broken system, coming into Big Ag, and having to adopt more masculine qualities," she says.

"These are giant systems, that are fundamentally flawed, and create challenges to move forward," she says.

Citing the example of a friend who works for a local large-scale producer, she says, "In corporatized ag, you have to report to a Board, and getting ecology on the radar is nearly impossible."

Rachael is quick to point out that this is not a gender war.

"There are so many who are suffering in the landscape. There are men who are still using the language and tools and chemicals of warfare. It is soul destroying," she says.

"I think many people know things have to change, but are paralysed."

Rachael believes there needs to be a refocus on natural capital at the centre of agricultural economics, and a focus on healing the landscape in a holistic sense.

"Our own 100 acres had been brutalised over years of industrial farming," she says.

"Sometimes it feels like we are limping along, but we are excited by the vision of what we want to achieve, materialising each season, and we know we have the farmer network support to do it."

Rachael has faith that the catalyst for change will come with a younger generation of farmers, having more visible role models in communities, and proof of results on farm.

"You can't tell people what to do, but you can plant seeds of ideas... and water them!" she says.

Along with running the farm, Rachael and her partner Daniel are both currently studying a Bachelor of Science in Regenerative Agriculture with Southern Cross University.

"Starting our first module last year has put us in touch with a whole network of like-minded individuals and mentors," she says.

"There is a wealth of information out there, a Google goldmine, people doing incredible things," she says.

"The knowledge isn't coming from Government. It's coming from the farmers, from networks who are trying new things."

It's these global networks that Rachael believes are so important, and that provide ongoing inspiration.

"I've had tequila drinks via Zoom with some of my female regen colleagues in other parts of the world to share ideas, offer support, and have a laugh," she says.

"I call them my Sisters in Soil, and they help keep the wind in my sails!"

Further Information

www.rachaeltreasure.com

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The McLaren Vale Wine region in South Australia

IS A MODEL FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN WINEGRAPE GROWING AND WINEMAKING.

We caught up this month with Jennifer Lynch, General Manager of the McLaren Vale Grape Wine & Tourism Association (MVGWTA), during what has singularly been the most tumultuous time for the region's wine producers and exporters.

A WHOPPING 37% OF THE REGION'S 7324HA OF VINES ARE NOW CERTIFIED ORGANIC AND/OR BIODYNAMIC, WHICH MAKES IT ONE OF THE HIGHEST CLUSTERS OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA.

THE REGION WAS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN DEVELOPING THE PROTOTYPE FOR BENCHMARKING SUSTAINABILITY, NOW ENSHRINED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE INDUSTRY'S SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING AUSTRALIA (SWA) PROGRAM.

The region's exports and wine tourism markets have been disrupted as the COVID-19 pandemic rolls on, and by the impacts of global geopolitical tensions, particularly the impacts of China's tariffs on wine export, along with the UK's Brexit split, the end of the Trump era in the US, and deteriorating US-China relations. Added to this, the recent decision of the South Australian Government to lift the State's GM-free status.

"Gosh, it's been quite a year, hasn't it!" she laughs (ironically).

"And, we still don't know what the full effects will be at this point."

The McLaren Vale region currently produces around 27 million litres of wine annually, with 25% destined for export markets, half of which is shipped to China.

"Our exposure, therefore, is not as high as some other regions," says Jennifer.

"That said, we know there has been some contraction in the supply chain."

/ Continued from previous page

"What we are not clear on, however, is the full impact on 2021 grape growing contracts, and into 2022."

"Because wine is such an integrated business, we may not know our true position for another 2-3 years."

"It's not like other annual agricultural crops that are sold in the same year."

An unfortunate side effect has been an impact on local resourcing, with the loss of export focused roles, and in wine tourism particularly, for Mandarin speaking staff.

"This is very unfortunate as many have been working for years in our region, and are very much a part of our community," says Jennifer.

There have been some surprising opportunities that have emerged, however. Jennifer has observed that market supply chains have shortened, particularly in the US and UK.

"Where once, producers would have worked through an importer, then on to wholesale and retail, now it is often retail direct," she says.

"For existing suppliers with long-standing relationships and established markets, trade has been maintained, and it has actually provided positive benefits in terms of margins."

"There has been less opportunity and additional barriers for new entrants, however, as importers have focused on existing exporters, and have understandably limited portfolio expansions."

One thing that has stood strong throughout, however, is consumer demand for sustainably grown and sourced food.

"Consumer demand, already strong, has strengthened with the global health crisis, increasing the focus on health and wellness, food safety, and traceability [source of origin]," says Jennifer.

"It has served to reinforce changing consumer choices."

"People have always chosen organic for reasons of social conscience; they value sustainable food growing," she says.

Jennifer acknowledges that previously this may have meant a trade-off between perceived quality, but believes that organic wine product is now on par, if not exceeds, conventional quality.

"Wines from the McLaren Vale region are a premium product, and meeting or exceeding consumer quality parameters is seen as an additional reinforcement of choice. "

"What's good for 'me', is good for 'we' – these consumer choices are good for the planet and the quality is there."

It's this knowledge of the consumer demand profile that made the recent decision of the South Australian Government to lift the State's GM Moratorium so difficult to comprehend.

"We were very disappointed, of course, with the recommendations of the initial GM Crop Advisory Committee report, and again, with the Minister's decision not to maintain GM free designation for those regions who had requested and proved trade advantages," says Jennifer.

"For South Australia, with its target goal of $23 million in food, wine and agri-business production by 2030, we feel that this decision is not reflective of market demands, and represents a significant missed opportunity," she says.

"We believe the decision should have been taken designation by designation, in the interests and profile of each region."

The MVGWTA will continue to promote the region's GM-free credentials, and to pursue avenues to ensure effective risk management for its producers, in conjunction with the City of Onkaparinga.

This is an inherent part of maintaining the McLaren Vale's position as a premium, sustainable grape and wine production area.

McLaren Vale has always been the leading light, in sustainable grape and wine production, which Jennifer believes has evolved from the region's natural climactic advantage, an underpinning community philosophy, and a deep understanding of consumer preference.

"People are inherently more disposed to a sustainable mindset in our region," says Jennifer.

"There is a genuine belief in managing the way in which we farm, to ensure that we are leaving things better off for future generations."

The latest Sustainable Winegrowing Australia SWA report for the McLaren Vale district shows that 72% of wine grapes are sourced from SWA vineyards, with the region scoring highly across aspects of soil, water, pest, disease, biodiversity, and waste management.

"We understand that change doesn't happen overnight, and that it can be overwhelming when you consider all the areas of wine production."

"What we do aim for, is to encourage continuous improvement. An emphasis on growers achieving year on year improvements within the triple bottom line framework."

Jennifer says that there is a great community in the region, and producers that are happy to share information and provide mentoring opportunities. The MVGWTA itself runs a program called The Focus Vineyard Series that looks at case studies of well performing vineyards, and identifies how they have made the change, with advice ranging from the strategic to the practical.

"This peer-to-peer interaction is so important in helping to overcome any fear of change," she says.

Further Information

Visit the McLaren Vale Grape Wine & Tourism Association

Students get their hands dirty to rid campuses of herbicides.

THE YOUTH-LED HERBICIDE FREE CAMPUSES (HFC) MOVEMENT CALLS FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES ACROSS AMERICA, AND IN FACT THE GLOBE, TO STOP THE USE OF SYNTHETIC HERBICIDES FOR THE CONTROL OF WEEDS ON CAMPUS.

THE GROUP'S MISSION IS TO SPREAD AWARENESS AND ADVOCATE FOR ORGANIC MANAGEMENT ON SCHOOL GROUNDS, WORKING WITH GROUNDSKEEPERS AND LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE STAFF, TO EDUCATE ON THE USE OF SAFE ALTERNATIVES.

We spoke this month with HFC Founder, Mackenzie Feldman, and two students from the HFC fellowship program, Emma Dax from Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles, and Kate Sabison from Sarah Lawrence College (SLC) in New York, to find out about their experiences. It was a privilege to meet these 3 women, and the determination, drive and commitment of all involved with HFC across the USA, is truly inspiring.

The HFC movement began at Mackenzie's own college campus, UC Berkeley, in 2017, where she was then studying for a degree in Society and Environment.

It was a passing comment from Mackenzie's Beach Volleyball coach at the time, that was the catalyst for herself, and fellow student Bridget Gustafson, to take action.

"She told us, if the ball rolls off the court, just let it go, because herbicides have been sprayed everywhere around the court," she says.

Mackenzie was already well versed in the harmful effects of toxic herbicides, having grown up in Hawaii, which she describes as "ground zero for industrial agriculture, where they do the majority of the GMO corn seed testing for resistance to pesticides."

Both Bridget and Mackenzie were determined to change the use of these harmful herbicides at UC Berkeley and, "with our student voices and hands, we worked collaboratively with the grounds maintenance team and managed to turn things around," she says.

We received a grant from 'Beyond Pesticides' to bring in, and work with a horticulturalist, on a pilot project to convert two sites on campus to all-organic, and have since converted many more spaces. Students even created a herbal garden in an area that used to be managed with herbicides."

After graduating in the summer of 2018, Mackenzie found herself in San Francisco at the time of the landmark trial of Dewayne

"Lee" Johnson vs. Monsanto Company.

"It did truly feel like we were witnessing history, nobody ever goes against Monsanto, so it was crazy and inspiring to see a groundskeeper who was literally dying of cancer do this," she says.

It was at the trial that Mackenzie befriended "Lee", who then became an advisor for the group.

"That was the moment we knew our work could expand beyond UC Berkeley," she says.

In 2019, HFC worked with the Protect Our Keiki Coalition and brought Lee Johnson to Hawaii to tell his story. They achieved getting all herbicides banned from all public schools in the state of Hawaii. Watch here

This was also the year Mackenzie received the 2019 Brower Youth Award for her work with HFC. Watch here

Fast-forward to 2021, and after some very challenging times, a lot of research and help from mentors, HFC has expanded across the country – having now worked with 18 campuses and 31 sponsored Student Fellows throughout the US.

However, COVID has had an impact over the last year and HFC (like most businesses across the globe) have needed to adapt. "We've developed an 'accelerator program', where we've selected 6 schools in 6 different states, that will make the most change, and ultimately develop a replicable model to be utilised in regional hubs," says Mackenzie.

"It's inspiring to see how students have run with the program and the outreach we have achieved. But, what I took away from the trial, was how powerful it was to hear Lee Johnston's story as a groundkeeper, so we try to centre our teaching and campaigns around working with the groundkeepers, because at the end of the day they are the ones most impacted."

Through the continual hard work of the students, all 10 University of California (UC) campuses have since banned use of glyphosate, and HFC is further pushing for campuses to adopt fully organic land management practises by 2025.

In the future, HFC hopes to develop and offer schools and universities Herbicide-Free Certification, cementing the work of all fellow students, who paved the way before them, in removing herbicides from schools.

"We want every school in the country to be herbicide free, and I have no doubt that it will be the case eventually. It's up to the youth to make it happen sooner, than later," says Mackenzie.

"A lot of our students don't just care about herbicides on their campus, it's about a larger issue of spreading awareness of herbicides in agriculture, to protect farm workers, and keep toxins out of our food," she says.

"We want to see our EPA have stricter regulations and get some of these most toxic herbicides banned from the country."

"We see that if students can push their schools to do this, it can have a ripple effect, spreading awareness to make change around the country and globally."

TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE AT SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE (SLC) IN NEW YORK, IS HFC FELLOW, KATE SABISON.

Kate and fellow student, Leia Pfeffer, are very much at the start of their journey to transform SLC campus.

Kate was required to complete a semester long research project for her studies in food agriculture environment and development. Her lecturer suggested HFC as a project focus, as he was aware of their achievements at UC Berkeley, and after some research, Kate realised they could apply for a HFC Student Fellowship. The fellowship is a 12-month program, where students are given support and strategies to navigate and engage with groundskeepers, university faculty, and students, to become herbicide free.

They were stalled in their initial efforts as the pandemic hit New York very hard and SLC shut down. However, this didn't deter the pair, who spent their downtime researching what SLC used on their grounds, reaching out to groundkeepers and facility directors.

Through dogged determination, they were able to produce a 15-page report that outlined where and what herbicides and chemicals were used on campus. The pair also co-hosted a webinar with the Black Institute on "Environmental Racism in New York City," which attracted a lot of interest. The webinar explored the disproportionate exposure of Black and Brown communities to toxic pesticides in public spaces; a reality highlighted in their study, "Poison Parks".

In the short term, their efforts will continue to focus on building awareness throughout the student community, and achieving buy-in from the University faculty.

"Once we are back on campus, the biggest thing for us will be starting weeding days, and showing the school we are dedicated to this, says Kate.

Over at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles, Emma Dax, is progressing existing HFC initiatives on campus.

Emma was fortunate to pick up the baton from a previous HFC fellowship student at LMU, and has experienced very positive buy in from the University.

"Our head of grounds is very supportive of HFC, and has even offered to donate the money saved on purchasing herbicides to the group, for equipment, such as gloves for students to use on our weeding days," she says.

LMU was also hit by pandemic enforced school closures, but Emma feels the groundwork already laid, should result in a visible difference, once students are allowed back on campus.

"Now, it's about educating the student body on where the herbicides are on campus and why they should care about it, and supporting the grounds crew to go organic," she says.

"We hope to have something in writing from LMU supporting our continued efforts," says Emma.

"Ultimately working to be organic, not just herbicide free, would be very meaningful".

Goodbye to Green Lawns?

One of the biggest challenges on campus is the entrenched perception of verdant, emerald lawns, reflecting the prestige of the University.

Lush, green lawns have become a big selling point throughout the educational sector, and Mackenzie, Kate and Emma, all agree a cultural shift is required to change perceptions.

The concept of well-kept grass areas in gardens was developed in Europe in the 1700s, and due to the high maintenance required, it was only something the wealthy could achieve. These practices were then adopted in America in the early 1800s.

"Lawns require a lot of water, and while there are ways to organically manage lawns, is it actually warranted, or even necessary?' asks Mackenzie.

We use the messaging 'decolonise aesthetics' when we speak about lawns, to help people understand the value we place on lawns today, has been shaped through colonial experiences," she says.

"We must educate people that other native plant species, and even weeds, such as dandelions, are not 'evils' and may in fact be beneficial."

Emma agrees this challenge exists at LMU.

"We have green lawns everywhere, it's where they hold events, it's a selling point," she says.

"Achieving a cultural shift will be hard, but we plan to encourage more planting of native species, and include signage in areas that aren't yet herbicide free (i.e. lawns), with information to build greater awareness of the hazards."

Over at SLC, Kate says that they developed a social media campaign #WELOVEWEEDS last summer, to help educate people about the importance of weeds, where students submitted art, photos and videos "to help encourage that cultural shift".

Today HFC has grown into employment for 6 staff, and Lee Johnston continues to inspire them in the work they do.

HERBICIDE FREE CAMPUS
EST 2017

"EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS TO CREATE SAFER, MORE SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL, BY STARTING LOCALLY, AND ADVOCATING FOR ORGANIC LAND CARE ON THEIR CAMPUSES".

JOIN THE MOVEMENT Herbicide free Campus Grounds

Online trading platform set to support WA supply chain.

The WA organic industry has operated as a somewhat fragmented market, with areas of undeveloped and uneven supply.

Despite growth in available lines, the local industry suffers from a lack of certified operators, as well as its remoteness from the other States, with a high cost to ship product, and many gaps in the products on shelf.

These features of the market represent both a challenge and an opportunity.

Having successfully started and operated her own organic retail shop in WA, the Little Big Store, Julia Speight could see these existing supply chain constraints, and identified a particular need and opportunity at the wholesaling level.

"Initially, my retail business model was built around direct farm supply, however, I found this very difficult in WA, and had to operate through the wholesale channel also," she says.

"Whilst there are several specialist organic retailers across Perth and WA, there is little choice in wholesalers, and a real identified need to introduce some healthy competition," she says.

After selling her retail business, Julia set out to establish a new concept of online organic wholesaling, with the release of the platform Fairest Organic Network Australia (FONA) this year.

Through FONA, Julia is hoping to foster a more self-sustaining system, supporting development of a coordinated hub in WA for a wider variety of produce.

One of the key features of the system will be demand and supply reporting, that will identify demand shortages for specific produce that may assist farm planning longer term.

Online platforms are now being used in a range of agricultural trading systems, but Julia believes hers to be the first in the organic wholesale market, and in fact, for any wholesaler of fresh produce.

"Our system is a bespoke system that is intuitive to use; first stage proof of concept has been successful, and I look forward to introducing more growers to the platform," she says.

Julia's own entry into organics, was as a consumer some 10 years ago, although her 'greenie' mother has also been an influence.

With a mix of formal business education, entrepreneurial skills, and a passion for organic, that Julia brought into her business ventures, she was recently appointed to the Board of Organic Industries Australia, and is also active in the Certified Organic Biodynamic WA (COBWA) network as a Committee Member.

"AT THE END OF THE DAY, I WANT TO SUPPORT THE INDUSTRY HERE IN WA, AND CREATE GREATER VISIBILITY AND FAIRNESS IN TRADE," SAYS JULIA.

Further Information

Visit https://www.fona.com.au

https://www.cobwa.com.au

Organic Industries Australia

*Australian Organic Market Report 2017

No waste carrot recipes.

In a country where over 7 million tonnes of food goes to waste each year, anything we can do to reduce that horrendous statistic is something to smile about!

I truly believe that we need to rethink the language we use about food. When I present zero waste recipes, I often receive comments that refer to "scraps". That's such a misconception and something we need to work on. These are not scraps, they are food sources, and they are ingredients, each with their own specific flavour, texture and capacity to nourish.

Today, we are using carrots; every bit of them, the tops, the peel, and the body.

The fermented carrot sticks will last in the fridge for months and remain crisp and full of extraordinary flavour. The carroty tips used for the chimichurri is great with meat, poultry or vegetables and the peel crisps are brilliant on their own or as a side.

I hope you enjoy them as much as I enjoy bringing them to you!

Further information

Mandy Hall

FERMENTED CARROT STICKS

- 1 medium bunch of carrots - tops removed, peeled and those two elements set aside
- 1-2 inch piece of fresh ginger - sliced finely
- 1/4 tsp chilli flakes (optional)
- 1/4 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 small clove of fresh garlic - peeled
- Filtered water
- Sea salt - the equivalent of 2% of all your ingredients (see note)

Method

Slice your carrots into whatever shape you prefer. I like vertical sticks, as they are easy to grab from the jar as a snack whenever you want them. The most important factor is to cut them into similar size shapes, you want everything to ferment at the same rate.

You will need a 1 to 1.5 litre sterilised glass jar with a tight-fitting lid, place carrots inside - a relatively tight fit is good. Add all other ingredients, including your salt and water, leave 1 inch headroom from the top of your jar and, if needed, use a washed cabbage leaf or a weight as a follower, seal with fitted lid.

I REALLY LOVE OFFERING UP FERMENTATION RECIPES FOR YOU TO CONSIDER EACH QUARTER, BUT PRESENTING THESE PARTICULAR RECIPES GIVES ME AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF JOY; **IT'S INCREDIBLY SATISFYING TO UTILISE EVERY SINGLE PART OF AN INGREDIENT.**

mandy hall's autumn recipe

The carrots can ferment at room temperature, out of direct sunlight for anywhere between 3 to 8 days. After day 2, it is important to give the lid of the jar a 1/4 turn each day to let out any built-up gases created as a result of the lactobacillus activity. Taste anytime from day 3 and, when you are happy with the flavour, place the jar into the fridge and enjoy at your leisure!

Note: to calculate salt percentages - weigh all your net ingredients and then calculate salt required e.g if everything weighs 1kg/1000g then the calculation is 1000 x 3% = 30 so you will require 30g of salt for your recipe.

CHIMICHURRI

- Carrots tops, washed and finely chopped (approx 1 cup)
- 2-3 TBlspn Red wine vinegar
- 1/3 cup of Extra virgin olive oil
- 2 TBlspn of fresh oregano chopped (2 tsp if dried)
- 1/4 tsp chilli flakes
- 2 cloves garlic - crushed
- salt and pepper to taste

Method

In a mixing bowl, whisk together the red wine vinegar and olive oil, start with vinegar and slowly add the olive oil, then add the chilli flakes, oregano, garlic, salt and pepper. Add the carrot tops and mix through thoroughly, dress with an additional amount of olive oil if you feel it's too dry. Serve straight away, keep leftovers in the fridge for 1-2 days.

CARROT PEEL CRISPS

- Peel from one bunch of carrots
- 3-4 TBlspn of olive oil
- 1TBlspn sea salt flakes
- 1tsp cumin powder

Method

Combine the salt and cumin in a small bowl and mix well, set aside. Heat the olive oil in a frypan until it reaches around 180 degrees Celsius, if you don't have a thermometer, test the oil by placing one piece of peel in the pan. We want it to sizzle calmly, if it doesn't, heat oil for longer, if it franticly sizzles, turn the heat down slightly. Add the peel in two batches so that you don't overcrowd the pan. Cook the peel until it starts to turn a golden colour (3 - 4 mins) then remove from the pan and drain on a paper towel or a tea towel. Sprinkle with cumin salt and serve immediately.

NEWS WRAP UP

There has been continued debate across the World around the question of whether 'produce grown without a soil substrate can really be organic?' particularly as the US continues to recognise hydroponics within Organic Standards.

In Australia, there are only a limited number of landless production systems that can be certified under the organic standards. Hydroponics, aquaponics and aeroponics systems cannot be certified under the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce.

At the heart of the debate, and common to many Organic Standards globally, is the fact that there is no direct definition of the key word 'soil,' upon which decisions for compliance, with these Standards, may be made by certifying organisations.

Defining 'what is soil' is part of a current topic for debate through the National Standards Sub-Committee, with a submission being made for an amendment to the National Standards relating to Container Growing, that serves to provide clarity in recognising circumstances that warrant use of a container, recognising nursery propagation and use of potting models for some plant products as having no inherent conflict with organic production philosophy.

The public consultation period on the submission ends 8 March.

The Organic Industry Standards and Certification Council (OISCC) is a primary consultative mechanism, recognised by the Federal Department for Agriculture, for all matters relating to national standards and certification for the organic industry – both domestically and for export.

The National Standards Sub Committee (NSSC) is an independent committee responsible for making recommendations to OISCC on changes to, and interpretation of, the National Standard. It is the primary vehicle through which industry stakeholders may seek to submit changes for review consideration and ensures our standards meet the needs of export markets.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economies and Sciences (ABARES) has recognised organic production as an opportunity for value creation in agriculture in a recently released report.

The report identifies that, in part, "future opportunities across the [agricultural] value chain will rest on the ability to competitively trade on product attribute, such as those related to food safety and quality," and in "responding to emerging consumer preferences."

https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/products/insights/value-creation-in-australia-through-agricultural-exports#increasing-use-of-global-value-chains-creates-opportunities-for-raw-products

Fact: Pesticides poisoning and killing the World

A new report published in the peer-reviewed journal BMC Public Health* examines the implications of the rise in pesticide use over the last 30 years.

It found an 81% increase in pesticide use since 1990, with researchers estimating that "there are about 385 million cases of acute poisonings each year, up from an estimated 25 million cases in 1990."

This means that of the 860 million farmers and agricultural workers in the world, about 44% are poisoned every year.

The greatest number of non-fatal poisoning cases was in southern Asia, followed by Southeast Asia and East Africa. Total fatalities around the world from unintended pesticide poisonings are estimated at around 11,000 deaths per year. Nearly 60% of which occur in just one country, India.

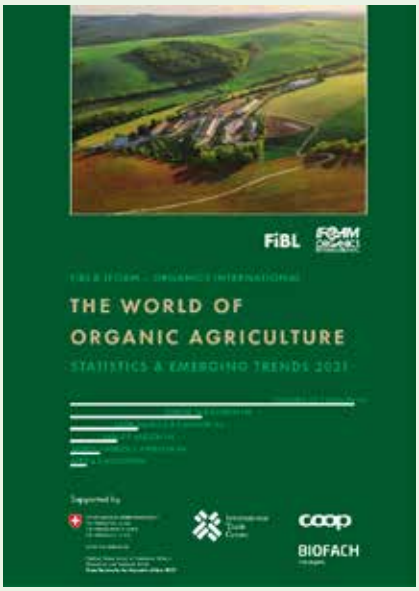
*"The Global Distribution of Acute Unintentional Pesticide Poisoning: Estimations Based on a Systematic Review"

Further Information

https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/pesticides-poison-378-million-farmers-farmworkers-every-year/

FiBL and IFOAM - Organics International launched the yearbook "The World of Organic Agriculture" - Edition 2021 during BIOFACH e-Special. View or download the yearbook and the slides of both sessions where the results were presented here:

https://www.ifoam.bio/news/download-world-organic-agriculture-and-its-slides



UPCOMING EVENTS AT HOME & AROUND THE GLOBE

NATURAL AND ORGANIC PRODUCTS EUROPE

Date: 18 – 19 April 2021 **Location:** ExCEL London, London UK

Europe's biggest trade show for natural & organic products, with over 700 exhibitors from around the world.

NORTHERN AUSTRALIA FOOD FUTURES CONFERENCE (NT)

Date: 17 - 20 May 2021 **Location:** Darwin Convention Centre, Northern Territory

Australia's leading conference on agricultural development in the North. This year's conference theme is Development and the Environment, informing investors and policy makers on sustainability trends in the industry, and the role agriculture can play in safeguarding the North's environmental resources.

NATURALLY GOOD EXPO - SYDNEY - MAY 2021

Date: 30 – 31 May 2021 **Location:** ICC Sydney, Darling Harbour

Naturally Good is the leading business platform for natural, organic and healthy brands to meet with retail buyers, distributors and wholesalers.NASAA Organic and NCO will be attending the Naturally Good Expo, so if you are planning on going be sure to pop in and say hello.

HORT CONNECTIONS EXPO

Date: 7 – 9 June 2021 **Location:** Brisbane Convention Centre

The conference theme Sustaining the Future of Fresh, will look at the many ways we as an industry can help producers to grow more, with less. Whether it is through technology, labour solutions, or just general financial and environmental sustainability.

ORGANIC WORLD CONGRESS - FRANCE - SEPT 2021

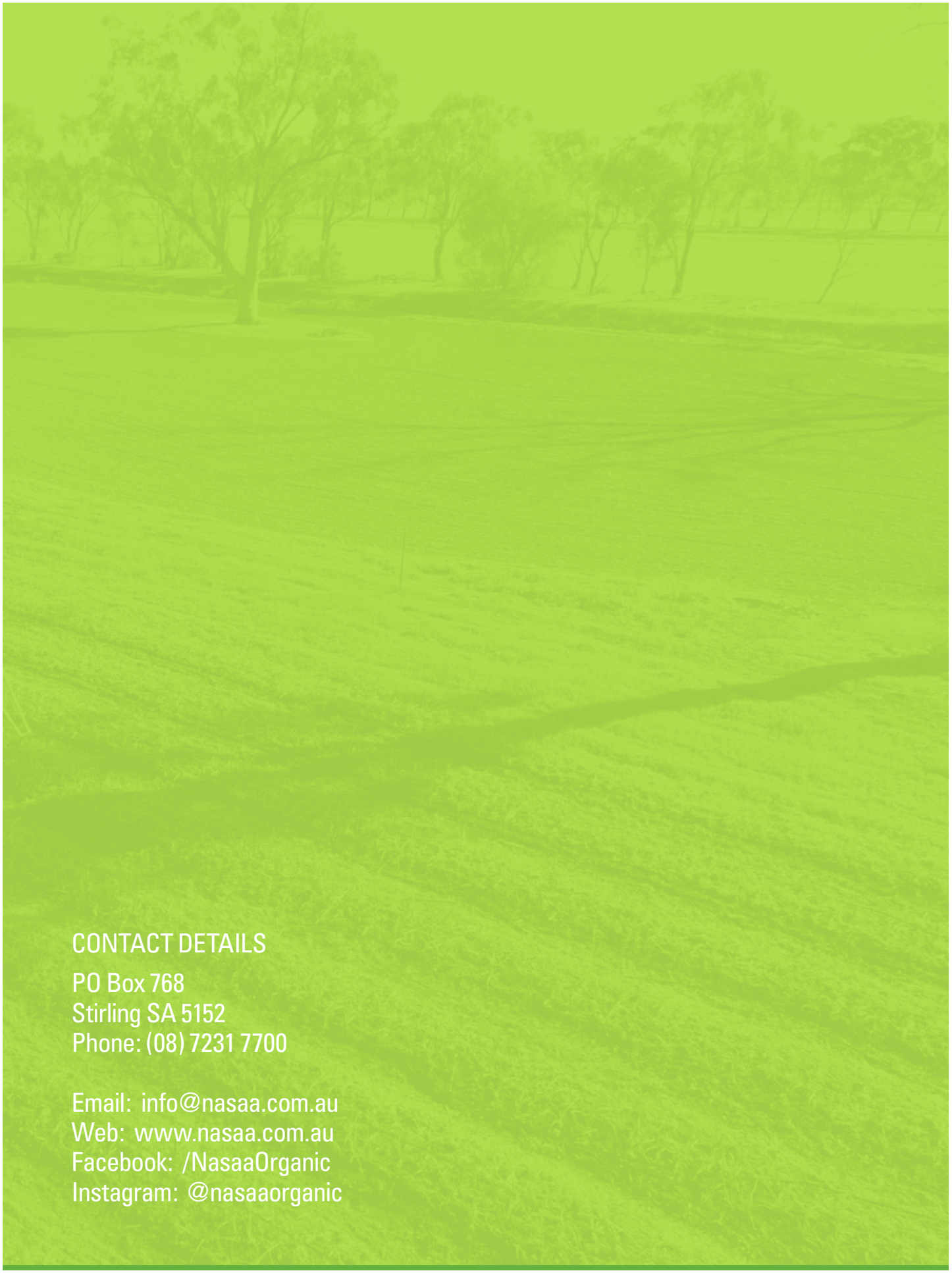
Date: 6 – 10 September 2021 **Location:** Rennes, France

The organic sector assembles every three years to host the Organic World Congress (OWC), the world's largest organic gathering, but in light of recent developments around COVID-19 this event has been postponed until 2021.

EVOKE AG - PERTH - FEBRUARY 2022

Date: 15 – 16 February 2022 **Location:** Claremont, Perth, Western Australia

evokeAG. is the Asia Pacific's premier agrifood tech event. It allows delegates to explore what's next in the agrifood tech space, covering three main themes; food – farm – future. This exclusive event is an immersive experience delivering diverse topics and cutting-edge innovation from across the region and around the world, bringing people together to connect, collaborate and evolve all things agriculture.



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