

A 'Nui' generation: Brands taking the organic philosophy one step further

» Health, sustainability, community, environmental welfare, thoughtful living – these are just some of the factors that motivate organic purchase. But are organic operations practicing what they preach and is the 'organic philosophy' veering towards more places than the supermarket shelf? The answer is a resounding yes if companies like **African Pacific** are anything to judge by. **Jaime Newborn reports.**



Wainiyaku Splendour, Taveuni in Fiji.

ONE OF FOUR major collaborators of the **Pacific Growers Export Partnership (PGEF)**, African Pacific

distribute certified organic and fair trade products under their **Nui** lifestyle brand around the world, describing themselves – like many – as an ethical trading company.

“Committed to empowering and assisting Island Communities in the South Pacific to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth and development” reads their charter.

What makes this brand – facilitators of handmade virgin coconut oil for more than ten years – so unique, is that every inch of its marketing ‘story’ – community, opportunity, equity, equality and empowerment, is real.

The company focuses on assisted production of three sustainable pacific island commodities – coconut, cocoa and carbon credits – sourcing premium-price contracts for communities who lack the resources to locate them independently, and selling product to a further 600 retail outlets globally.

As a result, small island societies with no market influence, limited real income and a threatened cultural existence have tightened their control on their own economic futures, minus foreign dominance.

“Vanuatu for example, has just signed its first 50 tonne soap contract in a deal that will deliver approx. \$70,000 US dollars straight to the island”, says Andreas Lombardozzi, CEO.

“And a new contract for the export of 50 MT of premium cocoa for processing, branding and distribution in the EU will deliver another AUD\$60,000.00 to 450 people in the north of Malekula (also in Vanuatu)”.

If he sounds proud, it’s justifiable. Deals like this are the result of ten years of work in a region most companies have steered clear of.

“There is an old saying – do you want to make a small fortune in the pacific? Bring a large one!” quips Andreas.

“The pacific has tiny communities at the forefront of climate change, scattered across one of the largest geographical regions in the world, with low population



Fermentation of coconut, Malekula in Vanuatu.

(organic) Charter, Fair Trade principles and ethical business practises most strongly reflected African Pacific's own business model.

"We're operating under what I describe as an 'organic economy' – it's complex and diverse and it works through its complexity. When you have large scale capitalist driven agriculture, it's easy to quickly build volume and align with large markets. But that system can't handle little one acre pacific blocks.

"It has always been our intention to build an organic business structure which we define as gaining strength from its complexity and bio-diversity, and is not reliant on the simplistic linear systems that dominate our present economic world. An 'organic economy' under this approach is based on ethical exchange and social and distributive justice".

He says the potential of the South Pacific to achieve this is "beyond anything we've seen".

"It's absolutely a different economy. There's a different pace and culture is intrinsically linked into anything that gets done. Their working day is part of everything – social activities, life, self reliance, community – so it's a very holistic approach to business. I believe the Pacific is one of the most organic societies of our era".

And have buyers responded positively?

"We are slowly seeing the emergence of what we would describe almost as a 'Nui generation' amongst our consumers. Two per cent of every transaction value goes back to producers to build social infrastructure, and loyalty and support from shoppers springs from shared principles of social justice, environmental and cultural respect" says Andreas. ◀▶

density, small or limited economies of scale, a logistical nightmare given the distance to world markets, limited inter-islands trade – any obstacle you can name, they've got".

"What we were interested in doing was seeing if we could establish a supply chain management model that would measurably improve the livelihoods of communities in the South Pacific and connect 10,000 island growers with 1 million consumers around the world.

"We are strengthening information delivery straight to villages, which increases efficiencies by directly linking island sellers and international buyers without middle-men".

He says the system is designed to be operated in the long term by the communities it's established in and not by foreign over-seers.

"We operate on a micro level and look to create a robust economy right at the farm-gate. It doesn't work if you're relying on your own imported skilled resources to manage a project or if you educate a community and then leave. In Vanuatu there were supposedly a lot of cocoa growers trained, and machinery bought, but they never got a contract or opportunity to apply their skills.

"What we do is come in with big contracts and actively mobilise. We do everything from working with growers to feeding them market information and assisting in critical product marketing from the island because that's where they get

stuck. What we *don't* do is over-run the communities with our personnel. Management of production is up to them".

He says though many businesses claim ethical status by adjusting their inputs – saying, 'I use such and such an ingredient', real ethical operations were defined by what companies chose *not* to do. "African Pacific constantly and strategically steps back despite the presence of lucrative opportunity - it's the constraints we place on ourselves that make us ethical".

He says he was attracted to organic because the traditions of the IFOAM

