

## Independent organic retail

## Small is beautiful and here to stay

By CHRISTOPHER McCALLUM

In a world of avarice and *get big or get out* paradigms, small-scale organic retailers offer the food-passionate consumer a taste of old-world food and old-world values long lost in the endless aisles of conglomerate giants. From a small retailer perspective, what is truly exciting is that the move away from industrial food production is for the first time being driven by the educated consumer sick of the mass-mono-culture pesticide cycle, the GM nightmare, and the false reassurances of the agro-industrial complex.

In discussions with customers and colleagues, I have repeatedly said that organics and natural farming systems are far more than the sum of their parts. By this I mean authentic organics remains more a cultural movement than merely an industry; it encompasses community connectedness, a land ethic, an understanding of the sacred nature of the food cycle, and, in as much as possible, endeavouring to work with the seasons – something seemingly incomprehensible to recent generations who've come to expect major cultivars all year round.

Trying to replicate organics merely by substituting the inputs on massive mono-cultural croplands is not organics. Serious ecological problems are beginning to arise in the United States and elsewhere as a result of huge companies harvesting 'organic' produce on tracts bereft of biodiversity and gentle stewardship. Little consideration is given to preservation of flora, fauna, humus development or soil biota. The same environmental issues, including compaction and erosion, plague these 'organic' farmlands as much as those treated conventionally.

Our role as smaller independent retailers is to point out the beauty of supporting locally produced certified organic food from mixed farming, along with its high nutritional content and low shipment mileage. The health and environmental benefits of buying from small growers means a better,

**About the author**

Christopher McCallum is a director of the family-owned and run the organik store in Glenelg, a beach-side suburb of Adelaide. Operating for the three years and stocking a large array of fresh and dry grocery lines, its focus is on education both informally and via its organic gardening and cooking classes.



**Christopher McCallum's retail outlet, the organik store, works with small-scale growers and distributors.**

stronger and healthier community for all. Allied to that is the fact Australia urgently needs more small-scale skilled growers prepared to work with natural, modern and truly sustainable approaches to recreate flourishing family farms and regional communities. It goes without saying that those growers must be very fairly remunerated for their efforts.

Another significant spin-off for the organic movement has been the growth in food co-operatives and farmers markets. These can be directly attributed to the presence of vanguard organic retailers. These stores paved the way and continue to do so, constantly promoting the entry to the market of new grass roots growers who, because of their size, are of little economic interest to multinational supermarket chains.

The small organic retailer working cohesively with local small-scale growers and distributors has played a pivotal role in getting organic produce a mainstream retail profile in the minds of what was an indifferent, if not sceptical, shopping public. Certification is therefore a critical ingredient to ongoing success. Full organic retail certification also indicates commitment to *authentic* organic and biodynamic standards and the correct management and handling of produce.

That said, our customers value the ACO certification status, and, perhaps more so, what they perceive as the "integrity factor" – beyond certification or verbal tokenism – essentially rolling with seasonal shortages and, critically, not bulking out with conventional produce during the lean times. We are an organic outlet in every sense of the word and hope to see

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certified organic & biodynamic retailer

## Why Certified Organic Retail?

Consumers are becoming more aware of the environmental impact of conventional farming methods and the modern response has to buy organic – showing responsibility in doing the best for a sustainable environment. Organic certified retailers are important as the last link in a chain of products carefully grown and handled to organic standards. Essentially they provide assurance that what you buy is organic from paddock to plate – sustainable, non-chemical farming, no irradiation, no GE or GMOs, no chemical processing and care in storage, transport and packaging.

As organic foods become more popular there are more cases of retailers claiming to be organic or to stock organic without certification or means of guarantee. In certified organic retail stores, produce is clearly labeled with the certification number and certifier for the consumer's reassurance. Certified products are labeled as such only where accompanied by an organic transaction certificate or equivalent for traceability.

Not only do certified organic stores stock organic products but store management is more environmentally aware, for example in pest control and cleaning practices, use of energy, waste control, workplace health and safety and staff education. Management structure is also HACCP based for hazard and critical control point identification.

See section 8 of the Organic Standard – available at <[www.bfa.com.au](http://www.bfa.com.au)> – for more information on the requirements for certified organic retail.

## Looking for organic products?

Go no further than <[www.bfa.com.au](http://www.bfa.com.au)>.

Visit the organic product search, type in a keyword or use the menus to access contact details of organic retailers, wholesalers, processors, producers, exporters and more Australia-wide, as well as a list of the products they supply.

Visit the where to buy organic section (located under consumer resources) for lists of certified and non-certified organic retailers in every state.

more certified retailers adhering to a fundamental code of ethics covering this issue. Once again, it's about working with the seasons and understanding the issues faced by growers who can't at a whim resort to toxic systemic inputs to ameliorate pest or disease problems.

An earlier *Organic Journal* pointed out that "there is good food and cheap food but no such thing as good cheap food." As such, small retail outlets have the potential to offer this intimacy of dialogue in educating the new consumer in organic, environmental and nutritional politics; the challenge is constantly there.

As a vital conduit to farmers and the public, small organic retail affords a strong link to the past and, in many respects, is the key to the future of natural food trade. With ongoing public support, we hope to help curb the loss of diversity of shopping experiences as well as significantly reduce the deleterious health and environmental impacts of post-war approaches to farming, food-processing and handling. ■