

**Biological Farmers of Australia Media Release, Tuesday 01st
December 2009**

Market Update – Organic Horticulture

Farm gate prices – East Coast averages

Kent Pumpkins \$1.50 per kilo
Onions - \$50-60 per 20kg bag
Broccoli - \$38 per box (8kg)
Mangoes - \$42 a tray

In Season

Summer is always a favourable time with consumers to increase their fruit intake, savouring an abundance of Queensland mangoes, cherries, nectarines, apricots and watermelons.

Ross Cowling, co-owner of Brisbane-based United Organics, says that, “the quality of our fruit this season has been excellent. Unfortunately though, some of our salad lines from down south (Vic) and Queensland have suffered due to the heat waves.”

Out of the Farm Gate

Nick Miall, Sales Manager of The Organic Farm Gate (wholesaler) says summer has finally hit, and in the next few weeks consumers can enjoy an abundance of sweet corn, carrots, tomatoes, watermelons and rockmelons.

Nick comments on how the current demand for produce has lifted since last season, “I believe that the produce we have been putting out these last couple of months has been the best for at least 3 years.”

“We are also not carrying an oversupply of produce this season, which helps us in terms of achieving premium prices.”

Overall, Nick says that the weather is fickle, with the summer storm season threatening no rain or flood rain, depending on the location. However, currently farms are well positioned for consistent, high quality summer crops.



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Organics fruitful at farmers markets

Farmers Markets are a global phenomena. Their growth is consumer driven and with the average shopper now more educated about their food source, there is an active quest to support sustainable agriculture.

Alasdair Smithson, owner of Munch Crunch Organics, has been selling his certified organic produce at the Bryon Bay and Bangalow farmers markets for the past three years.

Alasdair believes that the sudden emergence and popularity of farmers markets in the past couple of years has been due to growing concern with where our food comes from. "I believe that many people are seeking fresh, local and seasonal food - farmers markets guarantee consumers all of this, along with the extra benefit of being able to choose organic."

Alasdair points out that farmers markets help promote fewer food miles, which assists to reduce our greenhouse emissions - a growing concern, especially on the eve of the United Nations Climate Change conference in Copenhagen next month.

"As supermarkets become global food giants, consumers are becoming more distant from the food they are buying. In Australia, it can take up to 5000kms for fresh produce to reach supermarkets and once the produce goes on shelf, it is generally 7-10 days old," says Alasdair.

Summarised, proximity means freshness and also savings on many levels.

Alasdair agrees that consumers want to know more about their food's background. "I believe this is why organics is so popular at farmers markets. Consumers seem to be more aware now of all the health benefits connected with organic food - they simply do not want their food laden with harmful pesticides and herbicides."

With farmers markets seeming to have made this shift towards supporting more sustainable agricultural practices, it is no wonder that markets such as Northey St Farmers Markets in Brisbane hosts approximately 90 per cent certified organic stalls.

Les Nicholls from Sandy Creek Organics has managed a certified organic fruit and veg stall at the Northey St Farmers Markets for the past three and a half years.

"I believe that the shift towards more people seeking fresh produce, in particular organic, has been due to consumers seeking the healthiest food. Certified organic fruit and veg is extremely popular, with people lining up at the markets before the sun rises - they simply want the freshest organic produce."

Les believes people are seeking to rebuild a connection with their food source.

"Supermarkets do not provide the freshest seasonal produce. Consumers seek that connection - they want to actually see the farmer - it helps build a sense of trust that their food has been grown with the consumers' best interests in mind."



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Are farmers markets the way of the future for local farmers?

Alasdair, who has an honours degree in Organic Agriculture, agrees. "I predict that in the next two years oil prices will peak, creating sharp increases in fresh produce prices due to increased transport costs - forcing consumers to seek more local and seasonal produce. I believe that this will help continue the boom of farmers markets."

Les agrees, saying that farmers (horticulture) in the future will only survive if they can attain more direct selling - farmers markets are a perfect avenue for this.

However, Les argues that if farmers markets are the way of the future, then the government will need to put more effort into ensuring there are enough farmers to support growing consumer demand.

"You have to remember that the majority of farmers markets are in urban areas, and if governments do not lift some of their regulations, then there simply will not be enough farmers to support the industry that is farmers markets," says Les.

Definitely food for thought...

ENDS

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