

Biological Farmers of Australia, Media Release 21 January 2010

2010; INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY

BIODIVERSITY AND BIOLOGICAL FARMING; A NATURAL PARTNERSHIP

Biological diversity is the resource upon which families, communities, nations and future generations depend.

It is the link between organisms, binding each into an interdependent community or ecosystem in which all living creatures have their place and role.

It is the very web of life.

Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

The Biological Farmers of Australia applauds the United Nations' proclamation of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. A statement from the UN points out that over the past half-century, human activities have caused an unprecedented decline in biological diversity, with species becoming extinct a thousand times faster than the natural rate. The statement goes on to say that "business as usual is not an option" and that a new biodiversity vision is needed.

IBIS World, independent global industry researcher, has recently reported organic farming to be the boom industry of the next four years in Australia – good news for biological diversity advocates.

Major independent studies have confirmed organic farming actively contributes to better levels of biodiversity at every level of the food chain than non-organic systems. Organic agriculture is proving that we not only must, but can, have our environmental cake and eat it too.

A major pillar of organic production, and the vanguard of biodiversity protection, is maintaining a rich diversity of plant and animal life as the basis for the health of crops, farmed animals, the environment and the community, which are all inextricably linked.

Under the Organic Standard, management decisions must take into account impact on native flora and fauna and hydrological considerations, embracing protection of shelter belts, corridors, wetlands and remnant vegetation protection. All forms of environmental pollution – chemical, genetic and physical – must be minimised and non-renewable resources must be conserved.

Rob Bauer, a fourth - generation farmer on his Queensland property in the Lockyer Valley, inherited land that the original European settlers had been obliged to clear – and keep clear of regrowth – by government dictates. Rob converted the property to organic farm



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land thirty years ago and since then he has seen a marked change in the diversity and populations of native animals and vegetation on his land.

Repair of much of the existing environmental damage was assisted by an ongoing co-operative venture between Rob and Landcare which began in 1985. On a demonstration block in a previously degraded area more than two hundred rare, endangered and "interesting" native trees were planted. Rob carried the concept through the whole farm, which now has, interspersed with the cultivated fields, flourishing native bushland which is home to innumerable native animals, birds and insects, as well as providing shade, shelter and fodder for farmed animals.

"When I was a young bloke there were no whip birds around; now they're even under the house and they're almost deafening at times – usually when we're giving an in-house presentation on organic farming!" says Rob.

Rob says that in spite of the drought he has seen increasing populations of many birds, such as topknot pigeons, peewees and grey-crowned babbler, whose numbers had been radically reduced by past use of agricultural poisons such as parathion (still available in Australia). Reptile numbers are also steadily on the increase.

"Biodiversity is a whole-of-farm concept," says Rob. "Even the soil smells better since the biodiversity within it is no longer being diminished by poisons."

There are outstanding natural features on Rob's farm that may not have survived under conventional farming practices, especially the wide-spread practice of burning; a centenarian tree covered with what is probably the oldest and biggest blood vine in this part of the world and a bottle tree, a "living drought reserve" boasting a 10 metre girth.

Rob conducts tours of his property; eager to demonstrate how much can be achieved by adopting sustainable husbandry of the land.

Rob Fenton, head teacher at Riverina TAFE's Natural Environment Centre near Albury, says biodiversity is what organic farming is all about, and he takes it to a micro-level.

"The main thing is the biodiversity in the soil – that's an indicator of general soil health and the whole healthy farm system follows on from that, to biodiversity in crops and animals to biodiversity in the natural environment," Rob says.

"Organic farmers protect biodiversity by not using harsh poisons but also by letting integrated pest management follow its natural course, which ensures that no one or two species of pest become dominant, and therefore a real problem."

Rob says that there is high demand for certified organic lamb chops produced by TAFE for the meat's natural taste, health benefits – and support for the environment and biodiversity.

From a global perspective, Rob says that organic farming is now more imperative than ever.

"As the climate wanders further from its usual patterns, farming systems will become increasingly stressed," he says.



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“Organic, strong farming systems that have embraced biodiversity will be the ones that have the best chance of survival.”

References ;

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Alexander. I , Grice.P, Evans.A (2005) Link via <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6496-organic-farmingboosts-biodiversity-.html>

International Biodiversity day: <http://www.bioversityinternational.org/>

International Environment day: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2008/english/>

ENDS

Photo opportunities; Rob Bauer and Rob Fenton are available for photos on their respective properties.

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