

Organic food: You've bitten into a world of biodiversity. You're eating from better eco-systems.

The benefits of biodiversity and best environmental practice will be formally recognised over the next two weeks as world-wide attentions go eco-aware – and organic is ahead.

The period, spanning International Biodiversity Day (22/05/98) and International Environment Day (05/06/08) provides opportunity for consumers to consider behind-the-scenes of eating organic – namely, increased species activity and wildlife preservation.

Dr. Andrew Monk, standards chair of BFA, says both have been left behind in non-organic agriculture.

“They’ve been at best neglected and at worst fundamentally under-mined over the last sixty years of singular agricultural focus on increased agricultural output (through synthetic chemical inputs)”.

“Functional biodiversity as utilised in organic farm systems should not be seen as a luxury – it’s an essential element of our food production systems.”

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

Among the species explicitly observed to increase under organic land management are invertebrates, insects, butterflies, birds, small mammals and flowering plants.

Insects benefit from use of organic pest control methods (Integrated Pest Management) which use a natural balance of important predatory insects to feed on and control problem pests, rather than applying non-targeted pesticides which eradicate all species.

In Australia, ladybirds, spiders, predatory thrips, wasps, praying mantis, ants and lacewings can be found working in organic farm systems.

Below the ground, diversity in the oldest form of life on earth – microbial – is also enhanced in organic soil matter. As an environmental bonus, Greg Paynter, BFA soil health technician, says better soil and crop biodiversity leads to better carbon storage.

“Diversity in plant life when multiple species of plants are grown means greater diversity in root exudates, which aids soil nutrient recycling and carbon sequestration”.

Diversity in the type of crops grown in organic systems also guards against possible food production system devastation from disease.

“Monoculture (where only one species of crop is grown intensively) creates an environment that is conducive to disease pathogens. The Irish potato famine where a narrow genetic stream of plants resulted in one strain of disease (potato blight) destroying their entire crop is a classic case in point. This is counteracted in organic systems to some extent by increasing farm resilience and viability through the eco-services of diverse fauna and flora” says Mr Paynter.



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Under the Australian Organic Standard, practices such as shelter belts, corridors, wetlands and remnant vegetation protection are encouraged for best environmental practise. It is mandatory for land managers to provide appropriate native vegetation areas greater than 5% of total farm land area.

“This is not a one day of the year event, but an every meal issue”, says Dr. Monk.

Contact BFA for more information and details of Australian organic farmers utilising biodiversity:

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The BFA has a vision for organic industry growth and education in Australia. Biodiversity and environmentally friendly methods of production are two good reasons to try organic and help the industry achieve its goal. More information is available at http://www.bfa.com.au/index.asp?Sec_ID=260

- (1) Data: Biological Conservation *Does organic farming benefit biodiversity?* Hole.D, Perkins. A, Wilson. J, Alexander. I , Grice.P, Evans.A (2005) Link via <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn6496-organic-farming-boosts-biodiversity-.html>
- (2) International Biodiversity day: <http://www.bioversityinternational.org/>
- (3) International Environment day: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2008/english/>



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