

A wholesaler's commercial focus grows industry

» Sitting at the helm of Australia's leading organic wholesaler/distributor, Eco-Farms, Philip Rougon has not only been instrumental in incredible growth of his own business but has played a major part in the development of the industry as a whole writes **Adam Birkby**.

Eco-Farms is a leading organics supplier, importer, exporter and wholesaler of fresh organic produce and grocery lines, established in 1986 in Sydney as a small operation selling organic fruit and vegetables to a niche market.

From these humble beginnings, Eco-Farms has grown to become one of the largest organic suppliers of grocery, fruit and vegetable and finished product lines in Australia. Their client base is small retailers, supermarkets, independents, manufacturers and export. They have since opened operations in three major cities in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia and supply product to all states domestically and export worldwide.

Products and supply

Eco-Farms has over two hundred fruit and vegetable products available for wholesale with many of their core fresh produce items available on supermarket and retail shelves. They are also a distributor for hundreds of branded organic lines, sourced domestically and overseas, across all major grocery categories.

Capitalising on the demand for organic product, an initiative of Eco-Farms was the development of their own brand of grocery lines under the name Absolute Organic. The product range covers a variety of goods from staple products such as rice and cereals to coffee, confectionery and cleaning products.

Reasons for success

Managing director Philip Rougon explains how successful Eco-Farms has been. 'Year in and year out we are receiving growth on average of 30 per cent a year, and we see



this increasing in the years to come as we continue to expand our organic grocery and finished retail product lines.'

Philip acknowledges increased consumer interest in organics when he says, 'Eco-Farms has and is continuing to experience a steady growth on the back of growing consumer awareness and demand for healthy food.'

The market

The balance between supply and demand is always a challenge for wholesalers as Philip explains. 'The ideal situation is to have

demand slightly outstripping supply and hence a greater return to our growers. Obviously we are grateful to not be in the conventional situation where markets are flooded, prices low and unsustainable, yet at the same time we need to be able to achieve a fair price for the consumer,' he says.

Philip believes that developing and maintaining good relationships with everybody in the supply chain has been paramount to their success. He sees Eco-Farms' greatest challenges in the future as maintaining a consistent supply and quality of products. In particular, the importance of quality growers and processors who are



committed to organic and biodynamic agriculture. 'Our growers have certainly been the backbone of our business and have helped place Eco-Farms in a leading position, with the ability to supply an ever-increasing number of produce lines. Maintaining a fair price for our growers and having long-term partnerships with them is essential.'

The future

As part of the increasing awareness of environmental issues, Eco-Farms has introduced a new packaging process. The majority of fresh produce is pre-packaged to prevent contamination from conventional produce during transport.

'We are grateful to not be in the conventional situation where markets are flooded, prices low and unsustainable...' Philip Rougon

Eco-Farms has implemented its own packaging made from environmentally sustainable product. The new 'Environmental Protection' trays, made from reeds and sugar cane, are recyclable, degradable and free from emissions or chemicals. This has not only benefited the environment but has also given Eco-Farms a natural look and feel to their product, which has provided them with a marketing edge.

Eco-Farms believes that education is pivotal to the future of organics. Tenay Barker, national sales and marketing manager of Eco-Farms, says, 'Australians need to be made more aware of organics. Education for both the consumer and retailer is necessary as Australia is well behind other countries, in particular the UK and America, however we have the potential to become big players.' Eco-Farms is heavily involved in industry education, working alongside the certification bodies, conducting university and college workshops on site and working with clients in promoting products and organics as a whole.

Eco-Farms is looking forward to continuing to fulfil the increasing demand for organic foods in Australian and international markets.




Weston Milling has been an important part of the Australian flour milling industry for over 50 years. During this time Weston Milling has developed a wide range of flours including a range of organic flours. Weston Milling has a fully integrated approach to the sourcing, transport and milling of organic wheats through a network of fully accredited organic farmers. Weston Milling's commitment to the supply of organic flours is based on our Tradition of Quality. For further details contact your local Weston Milling office.

FOR GRAIN
Contact: Mark O'Brien
506 Peel St, TAMWORTH NSW 2340
Tel: (02) 6766 1733 Fax: (03) 6766 8427
mobwci@optusnet.com.au

FOR EXPORT SALES ENQUIRES
Contact: Cameron Prowse
1 Braidwood St, Enfield NSW 2136
cameron.prowse@gwf.com.au




New South Wales
 Braidwood Street
 Enfield NSW 2136
 Telephone: (02) 9764 8222
 Facsimile: (02) 9742 5819

Queensland
 81 Chale Street
 Moorooka QLD 4105
 Telephone: (07) 3244 2303
 Facsimile: (07) 3244 2399

South Australia
 12 Thomas Place
 Port Adelaide SA 5015
 Telephone: (08) 8447 1544
 Facsimile: (08) 8341 2603

Victoria
 1 Munster Terrace
 North Melbourne VIC 3051
 Telephone: (03) 9329 7188
 Facsimile: (03) 9326 5118

Western Australia
 6 Noble Street
 Kewdale WA 6105
 Telephone: (08) 9353 3223
 Facsimile: (08) 9353 3224

Australian Made Use alcohol responsibly



Burragumbilli
certified organic beer

0414 772 686
www.burragumbilli.com.au




Pure Ingredients, Pure Style, Pure Taste!