

» By Jaime Newborn

‘Why go organic?’

27 years of answers, with Rob Bauer

Rob Bauer knows the benefits of organic better than anyone. He’s farmed organically for the past 27 years, from a time when “people publicly called me mad for even thinking about it,” he says.

While his personal belief in the superiority of organic food for human health, the environment and the community holds fast, he says the trick for getting people on the organic track is less complex – “we just need to make organic cool,” he states, as a simple matter-of-fact.

“I believe more education and awareness on not just why, but how and where to go organic is the next step for industry.”

If anyone knows, he will. As the largest producer of horticultural produce in Queensland, people seek the now well known Bauer’s Organic Farm fresh produce across Australia, everywhere from major retailers, to specialist outlets, and farmers markets.

The charismatic, easy-natured farmer has become a favourite with those curious about chemical-free, and busloads of people arrive at his farm - 1 ½ hours from Brisbane - each week to get the organic dirt.

“It’s incredibly important to me to put the benefits of organic to people in a way they can understand,” says Rob.

“It’s actually not that hard. I talk about simple concepts like carrots –how they suck liquid and nutrients, including chemical if it’s there, straight from the soil.”

“As soon as you sit people down and tell them what goes on the other (non-organic) stuff, you’ll hear people converting immediately from the back of the bus”.

He says the health benefits of organic, for him, are its strongest selling point.

“From the point of view of the farmer’s health, they’re undeniable.

“I started thinking about farming differently after growing up in the Lockyer Valley where many farmers were dying in their 50’s following high exposure to agrichemicals, often left over from the war.

“Farm children would go to the hospital with neuro problems and tumours and the doctors would say ‘not another one from



Bauers Farm conducts regular tours for school groups and other groups educating about organics.

the Lockyer Valley’.

“On-farm, everything from worms to birds would be dying.

“The soil was dead soil - we were on some of the best land in the world and were getting less from our most fertile paddocks. But outside the cultivated areas where chemicals weren’t being applied, the natural vegetation was flourishing.

He says he eventually drew his own conclusions.

“I sat up and said ‘this is not right’ and we cut chemical use slowly. There was nothing I could see that was stopping those kinds of effects being transferred to humans.”

He says as a farmer, he now feels reassured the product he supplies for consumption, is safe - “Unlike before we went organic - when we could legally provide produce to shops that had been sprayed heavily the day before”.

He says the disconnected gap between

those who grow food, and those who eat it, keeps agrichemicals in the dark.

“Most consumers have no idea about what agrichemicals are, or do.

Rob says he believes people are more attracted to organic when seeking better quality of life.

“This often includes older people looking ahead to retirement, while simultaneously feeling the early effects of damaged health.”

But he says organic will get off the ground when it is an obvious choice for the next generation.

“In terms of the environment especially, organic is the way of the future.

“We are still after 27 years noticing an annual continuous improvement in the soil and our crops. They’re robust, more resistant to disease; the plants are bigger and healthier.

He says initially, going organic for a farmer can be tough.

"The land and soil are exhausted from poisons and it takes time to restore life.

"But the long term results speak for themselves. There is wild-life around my farm that I have never seen before – birds and bats are back!"

He says ultimately, organic farming is about generating life – "where chemical farming focuses on destroying it".

He says converting to organic requires a re-education for farmers and consumers alike.

"Consumers at some stage need to come to terms with paying a bit more.

"Organic produce is a superior quality item. Unfortunately, when it comes to food, we've been trained to expect an excess of cheap supply that comes at a cost that is unsustainable to the farmers who produce it, to the environment in which it's produced, and to the health of the society who consume it.

"We will also need to address how we buy and store food.

Organic produce can be purchased from many places - big supermarkets, local markets or box schemes – and different options suit different lifestyles."

He says when it comes to organic, with so much work behind it, produce should be purchased only at the quantity needed, and stored carefully to minimise waste.

Rob says Australia, given its isolated location, has the potential to create a unique advantage globally if more people decide to go




Trudy Townson and Rob Bauer at the Organic Expo, Sydney. Bauer's Organic Farm dedicates a lot of resources and time to education and marketing of organic produce.

organic by becoming "one of the most pristine places in the world – that's pretty good marketing!"

He says the drive will come from consumer demand – but - "it's no good trying to push organic at anyone."

He says people will ultimately do what feels right for them.

"The benefits of organic won't be missed by anyone who starts looking harder – and that seems to be happening more." 



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