

Super Natural Organics

Australian Giant Garlic from Noosa

» By Jan Nary

Organic garlic may seem a very small niche market but for Peter Doff and Wendy Robertson of Super Natural Organics, regular stallholders at the weekly Noosa Farmers Markets, it provides a comfortable – and ethical - lifestyle.

Peter started farming organically on his Sunshine Coast property nearly twenty years ago.

"It wasn't fashionable or 'sexy' back then," he says. "I started on organic methods when I bought my first property. I had guava trees that were very susceptible to fruit fly so I did what everyone else did then, which was to spray them with poison. The pesticide lasted on the fruit and you couldn't pick it for seven days. We had young children and after reading those directions – well, spraying that poison just once converted me. We tried growing them organically but it didn't work so we ripped the trees out."

Peter then moved into small-scale production of a mixed range of vegetables, initially for home use. Any surplus he sold through the Nambour Co-op and at the Eumundi Markets, now a major tourist attraction. It was there he met Wendy Robertson. Wendy, whose young life on her family's conventional farm in New Zealand instilled in her a passion for doing things naturally, was growing vegetables on her own property – organically.

They decided to combine skills and resources about seven years ago and the foundations of Super Natural Organics were laid. "We chose to market and sell our own produce at the markets. That way we could keep the cost down and supply our local community with good quality fresh organic produce, Wendy says. "We haven't looked back."

Super Natural Organics (also known as SNOG – Super Natural Organic Garlic) is best known for, its garlic - massive, firm-fleshed, aromatic Russian garlic, (marketed as Australian Giant Garlic). Also grown on the Australian Certified Organic (ACO) 4ha



Super Natural Organics potatoes.

farm at Cootharaba in Noosa's hinterland is a selection of citrus, herbs, seasonal vegetables including potatoes, zucchini, okra, salad greens, broccoli and dwarf Cavendish bananas.

Wendy and Peter are both passionate about food production that is sustainable and non-damaging to the environment. In 1990 Peter was only the twenty-ninth operation to be certified organic in Queensland and was one of the first six auditors for ACO, (1994-99).

"Going organic was largely trial and error, researching what books were available and talking to other farmers - there was no Internet for research back then! It takes commitment but it became easier and there's no doubt that it's worth it," Peter says.

In the interests of organic one-stop market shopping, as well as maintaining a market for their own produce, Peter and Wendy sell

a range of produce from Eco Farms, certified organic wholesalers in Brisbane, and source produce from other local certified organic growers. The colourful tumble of potatoes, ginger, bok choy, celery, pumpkins and massive bulbs of garlic have most passers-by reaching for their wallets and their recipe books simultaneously.

As visually striking as the vegetables is the banner at the back and the A-frame stand in front of the stall, proudly proclaiming SNOG's ACO certification and displaying the well-known "Bud" logo. To Peter and Wendy it is essential to be certified and let shoppers know about it.

"Our customers trust it," Peter says. "Anyone can say their produce is organic but if you've got certification you've got proof. Customers will come to us before they'll go to a stall marked 'spray free' or 'chemical free' or just 'organic' because we're certified organic - it's different."

Peter says there is growing public awareness about the health benefits and general desirability of organic produce, on both personal and global levels.

"We used to tell our customers how much better our garlic is than the bleached, irradiated, gassed imported varieties. Now the customers come and tell us.

"People are thinking of the big picture,

Scapes – the best kept secret

Peter and Wendy have added scapes to their farm offerings – the stems and unopened flowers of garlic plants. Stripped of the fibrous calyx (sheath) that protects the flower, finely-chopped scapes make an excellent addition to salads, stir-fries, soups and any dish where a delicate garlic flavour – described as something between chives and shallots – is required.

About Garlic

Many wonderful qualities have been attributed to garlic in the diet; it is reputed to reduce the incidence of free radicals, lower blood pressure, protect against colds and flu, have antibiotic and antiseptic properties, prevent blood clots and protect against intestinal worms and some forms of cancer.

In some cultures garlic is said to keep vampires away. Peter says that there hasn't been a vampire attack on their property since he started growing garlic so perhaps there's some truth in the story.



too. Now that climate change and global warming is upon us we all have to do what we can. Customers connect that with organic growing; it's looking after your soil which increases its carbon levels which helps the climate. If everybody farmed organically perhaps we could stop global warming just by reducing the carbon in the atmosphere."

Peter and Wendy have three-and-a-half acres under cultivation, harvesting three tonnes of garlic a year which they sell on the Sunshine Coast and in Brisbane. Because they sell direct to the consumer

they can offer their produce at a lower retail price. They practice a three-year crop rotation system, alternating garlic with pumpkins and green manure crops like cowpea, soybean, vetch or lablab.

"The costs are not small – there are stall fees and wages to pay, cool rooms to run – but it works; we live a good life and it's doing

the right thing by the planet," he says.

"The personal satisfaction is in the customer feedback," Peter says. "For instance, they keep coming back for more of those potatoes. They're just sebagos - but they're my sebagos."

And for these growers, that is the (organic) cherry on the cake. ◀◀



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